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North Carolina Folklore Journal



North Carolina Folklore Journal

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Peter Compitello, Assistant Editor

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Dr. Carmine Prioli
Department of English, Box 8105
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695-8105
E-mail: prioli@ncsu.edu.

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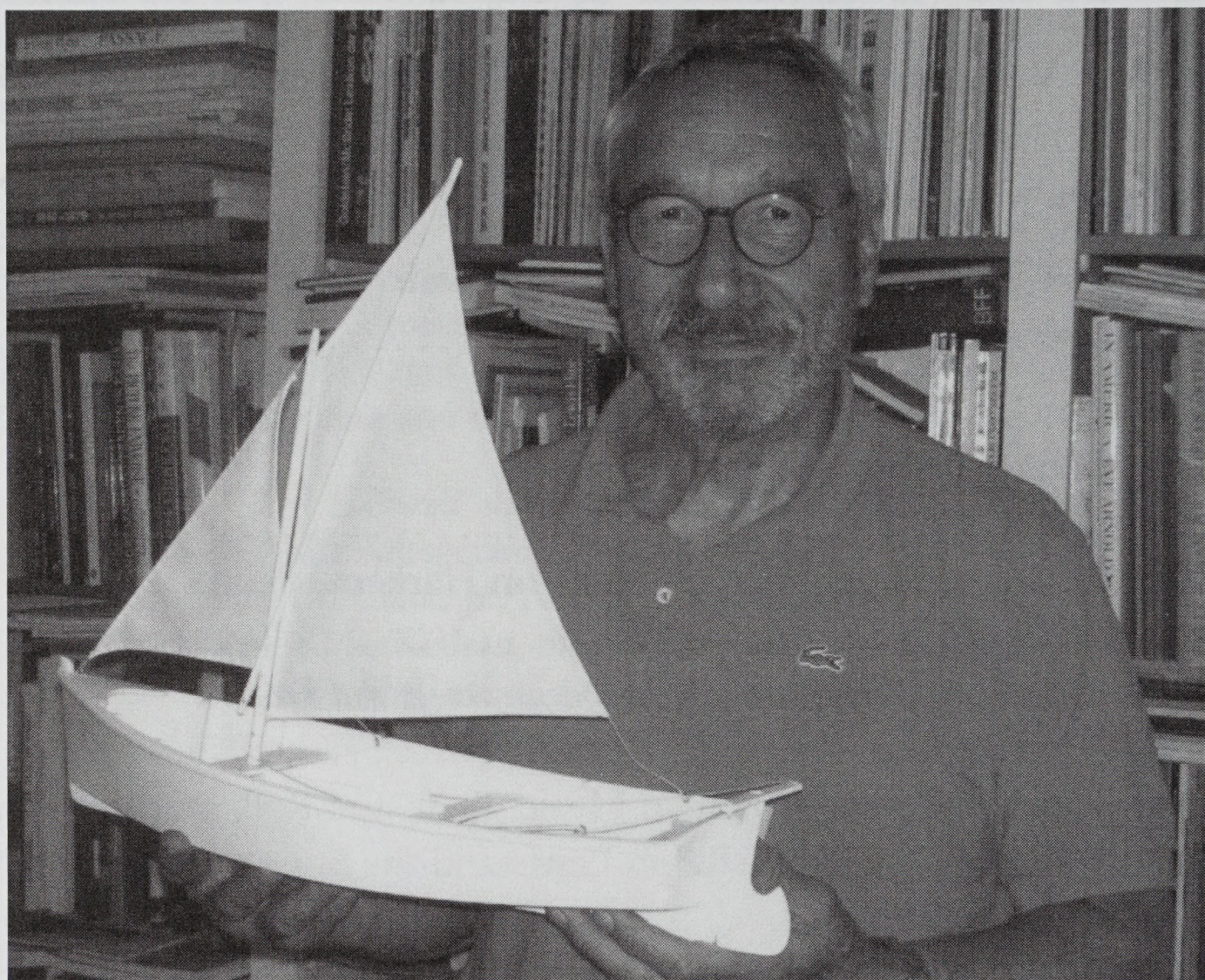
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Contents

Editor's Foreword	1
Preserve America Presidential Award: The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative	4
Essays:	
Our Web of Connectedness <i>Cathy Larson Sky</i>	7
"I came as a stranger": Ulrich Mack on Harkers Island <i>Carmine Prioli</i>	9
Reflections on Ulrich Mack's <i>Inselmenschen—Island People</i> <i>David Cecelski</i>	22
Bluegrass Meltdown: Mountain Music, Rock and Roll, and Family Tradition in the Music of Ralph Lewis and the Sons of Ralph <i>Burgin Matthews</i>	35
2004 Brown-Hudson Awards:	
Connie Mason: Folklorist and Folksinger <i>JoAnne Powell and Karen Willis Amspacher</i>	55
Earl and Maxwell Carawan: Musicians <i>Amy Davis</i>	58
2004 Community Traditions Award:	
<i>The Mailboat</i> <i>Connie Mason</i>	62
Certificate of Recognition for Excellence in Preserving Cultural Heritage:	
Robert A. Vogel <i>Carmine Prioli</i>	64
2004 Student Essay Competition Winners	67
Review Essays:	
<i>Who Owns Native Culture?</i> William J. Wheeler	68
<i>Howard Odum's Folklore Odyssey</i> Peter Compitello	72
Contributors	75



Ulrich Mack at his home in Hamburg, Germany. The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and the North Carolina Folklore Society presented this model sail skiff, built by James Allen Rose, to Mack on his seventieth birthday. *Photo by Elizabeth Prioli, 2004.*

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Editor's Foreword

In the last issue of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, we had the pleasure of demonstrating, with our focus on Greensboro's Cambodian community, how truly international North Carolina's population has become. In this issue, with the help and vision of the German photographer Ulrich Mack, we are also highlighting the international aspect of North Carolina culture, but in a different way. For Mack's work points out similarities that connect us as Americans to another, distant culture and people. In his remarkable book, *Inselmenschen—Island People* (1995), he shows us, for example, that in places like Harkers Island, North Carolina, and Pellworm, Germany, factors like work, family life, and the daily struggle against nature's forces create cultural affinities that rise above national heritage and history. Of course, there are obvious differences: while Harkers Island has been settled by permanent residents for only about 300 years, the remains of Pellworm's Church of St. Salvator date back to 1072 and show that the island has been populated at least since the eleventh century. Also, families on Pellworm speak German, while on Harkers Island they speak English. (On the other hand, the populations of both islands speak respective dialects that are nearly incomprehensible to their mainland counterparts.)

But the environmental similarities shared by the people of Harkers Island and Pellworm are striking: magnificent seascapes and sunsets, torrential rains and prevailing winds, shallow stretches of salt water, erratic and migrating channels, vast mudflats and serene marshes. In addition, traditional maritime culture on both islands has been under siege for at least a generation from the combined effects of governmental regulations, increasing costs of healthcare and insurance, reduced profits from commercial fishing, and an aging population that is losing its young people to more lucrative and secure jobs on the mainland. These are just some of the more obvious similarities. There are others that are more profound, and intensely painful.

In his book, Mack includes portraits of types of people: doctors and ferry boat captains, children and fishermen, clerks and retirees ("pensioners"), and widows. Among the Harkers Island portraits is one of Nettie Brooks (p. 25), which includes the caption: "One of Nettie's four sons was killed in World War II. She wears a bonnet to protect herself from the fierce sun." Nettie's son, Livingston Brooks, was the first of five Harkers Island men lost in the war. His ship was sunk off the coast of North Carolina.

Nettie Brooks' portrait invites comparison with the widows of Pellworm, particularly the image of Jenny Nommensen (p. 24). Jenny's caption reads: "Jenny lives with her daughter, Hanna Eike Ohrt, the mother of Annemarie and Jeje." Jenny Nommensen died about six months after Mack took her picture. She was buried in the local churchyard and her gravestone displays the following inscription:

Friedrich Nommen|en
6.10.1884. † 4.12.1943
Jenny Nommen|en
geb. Boy|en
6.5.1890 † 24.3.1982
Jens Nommen|en
22.1.1915 vermißt 1945

Friedrich was Jenny's husband, who died in 1943. "Boy|en" was Jenny's maiden name. Jens was her son. "Vermißt," in this context, means "missing in action." Like Nettie Brooks on Harkers Island, Jenny Nommensen of Pellworm lost a son in military action at sea. Jens' name also appears on a discreet memorial to nearly 100 other Pellworm men who died during World War II.

This past summer I had the honor of repaying Mack in a small way for demonstrating in his photographs some of the experiences that bind the people and families of Harkers Island to the people and families of Pellworm. On the occasion of his seventieth birthday, my wife, Elizabeth, and I visited Mack and his wife, Katrin, at their home in Hamburg. On behalf of the North Carolina Folklore Society and the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum, I presented Mack with a model sail skiff built by James Allen Rose. The winner of many recognitions for his craftsmanship and story-telling (including a North Carolina Folklore Society Brown-Hudson Award [1996] and a North Carolina Folk Heritage Award [2000]), James Allen is also the son of "Big" Dallas and Mary Rose, the Harkers Island couple whose images grace the cover of this issue. Mack was demonstrably grateful for the skiff. He is proud to have an authentic piece of Harkers Island culture displayed prominently in the picture window of his living room. But he does not consider his work complete. "There is still something to be done," he declared, and added: "I will not rest until a young man from Harkers Island marries a young woman from Pellworm!"

In this issue of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, we are initiating with Cathy Larson Sky's "Our Web of Connectedness," what we hope will be a series of brief essays exploring the meaning of traditional culture to those of us from "non-traditional" backgrounds who study, celebrate, promote, and preserve folklore and folklife. What is the lure of traditional culture? Why have we become, in our individual ways and according to our particular tastes, what Cathy calls "foster children" longing for the "old, wild magic" of the music (or the pottery, quilts, recipes, dialects, customs, and folkways) of other times and places? What is the "need" for folklore? Why, when its existence is so imperiled, is folklore so necessary to our well-being as people and as a nation? What forms of "folklore" are replacing those we have already lost or are fast disappearing? What role does the Internet play in both the disappearance and the creation of folk customs and groups? Who will navigate us into understanding these new realms of human experience?

These are some of the questions we invite our readers to ponder. We hope to share your answers in future issues of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*.

Carmine Prioli



Gravestone of Friedrich, Jenny, and Jens Nommensen. Neue Kirche (New Church), Pellworm, Germany. Photo by Carmine Prioli, 2004.

Preserve America Presidential Award: The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative



Mary Regan and Wayne Martin (center) receiving the Preserve America Presidential Award from President and Mrs. Bush. *Photo courtesy of the White House, 2004.*

President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush presented the Preserve America Presidential Award to staff of the North Carolina Arts Council on Monday, May 3, 2004, in special ceremonies in the Oval Office and in the East Room of the White House. Folklife Director Wayne Martin and Executive Director Mary Regan received the award on behalf of agencies, non-profit organizations, and individuals in the Appalachian region of North Carolina, Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia who collaborated on a project known as the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative. Partners in this initiative have worked since 1996 to enlist heritage tourism as a means of preserving regional cultural traditions, while promoting education and sustainable economic development.

The Preserve America Presidential Award is a national program administered by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to preserve our national heritage. The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative received the Presidential Award in the category of Heritage Tourism as an exemplary project that demonstrates sustainable use, protection, preservation, and interpretation of America's cultural heritage assets.

In North Carolina, the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative consists of four heritage tourism trails: the Blue Ridge Music Trails; the Cherokee Heritage Trails; the Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina; and Farms, Gardens and Countryside Trails. The music trails project extends into Virginia, and the Cherokee trails into Tennessee and Georgia. These themed trails include guidebooks for driving tours that

explore important cultural stories of the southern mountains. They offer multiple lenses through which travelers can deepen their understandings of the region, and they teach the value of good stewardship for the region's cultural resources.

For more than a century, North Carolina's mountain region has been recognized as an important area for the study and collecting of American traditional culture. During the same period, images of mountain ballad singers, fiddle and banjo players, flatfoot dancers, storytellers, quilt makers, basket weavers, potters, carvers, and other traditional artists have been used to attract tourists. Often, these visitors have been diverted to commercial attractions that have little to do with authentic traditional culture. The Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative departs from conventional tourism practices and assumes that many people are genuinely interested in authentic regional traditions and artists. The four heritage trails of the Initiative guide visitors to sites, venues, and events where they will be welcomed and can experience local traditional culture for themselves.

The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina, developed by HandMade in America in the mid-1990s, were created in collaboration with local communities and focused on a longstanding cultural tradition—the handmade object. They take visitors to historic craft sites, private studios, shops and galleries, historic lodgings, and restaurants featuring local foods. Participating shops and galleries in the Craft Trails project have seen 24% sales increases.

Three other trails expanded on the model pioneered by HandMade in America. By adding traditional music, Cherokee culture, and agricultural heritage to the crafts component, the Initiative has created new opportunities for residents and visitors to practice and experience cultural traditions of the region. The music trails project showcases some of North Carolina's and Virginia's richest and most distinctive traditions of music making, including string-band music, bluegrass, ballad singing, blues, and a wide variety of sacred music. The Cherokee trails identify culturally important Cherokee sites with interpretation from a Cherokee perspective. Exhibits, publications, and programs that feature authentic Cherokee traditional artists from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians provide access to understanding one of the most significant and least understood cultures of the region. The agricultural trails guide visitors across the region to farms, gardens, orchards, farmers' markets, vineyards, nurseries and other sites that feature and celebrate the region's agricultural heritage. The first edition of *Farms, Gardens & Countryside Trails of Western North Carolina* was published in 2002, followed by the third edition of *The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina*.

Publication in the spring and summer of 2003 of the last two guidebooks, *Cherokee Heritage Trails Guidebook* and *Blue Ridge Music Trails: A Place in the Circle*, marked the formal completion of the project. Companion web sites (www.blueridgemusic.org and www.cherokeeheritagetrails.org) are maintained for the music and Cherokee trails.

Other products resulting from the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative include: *The Cherokee Artist Directory* (2001), a fourth grade interdisciplinary curriculum project that brings traditional musicians from western North Carolina to participating elementary schools, and North Carolina Arts Council assistance to regional museums for the planning and development of new exhibits that interpret Cherokee history and culture. In addition, the Blue Ridge Heritage Initiative partners assisted the Junaluska Memorial and Museum in receiving funding from the National Assembly for State Arts Agencies to develop a medicine trail and interpretation that educates visitors about the Snowbird community of Cherokees located in Graham County, North Carolina.

Our Web of Connectedness*

~ by Cathy Larson Sky

When I tell them that my family spent 1982 living in County Clare, listeners are apt to sigh and say something like, “A whole year in Ireland! That must have been so wonderful.” Well, yes. And no. Multiply a typical wet North Carolina spring by ten, and you’ll have the general idea.

The heavy rains of 2003 brought it all back to me—the dash out to the back yard to hang the sheets during a sudden spate of sunlight, and the sinking feeling that followed when I forgot to watch the skies and the laundry got soaked on the line, staying dripping wet for days. I remember

falling asleep on damp pillowcases and awakening to start a turf fire in the dank kitchen, even on summer mornings.

Yet, I can still say that our year in County Clare was wonderful. I was at the height of an intense love affair with Irish traditional music. I don’t think there was a morning I woke up without hearing tunes in my head. At night, when the kids were finally in bed, I would take out my fiddle and play until the bow drooped and I had to turn in. I was playing very badly, I realize now, but I never felt more passionate about the music.

During that time, the Chieftains were performing all over the world, turning



Legendary Irish fiddler, Junior Crehan, lilt-ing a tune for the author in Gleeson’s, a small pub on the west coast of Ireland in Coore, County Clare. *Photo courtesy of Cathy Larson Sky, 1996.*

everybody on to the beauty of Irish music. But their cultured sound hadn’t the power of the raw music of rural Ireland that thrived in its native habitat like lichen on moist bark. I had access to two worlds—to records and tapes of contemporary Irish musicians, and to remote old Irish pubs, some the size of large closets. In these out-of-the-way places,

*An earlier version of this essay appeared in *The News & Observer (Raleigh)*, June 3, 2003.

tunes were played with fierce abandon on instruments that were sometimes warped and hopelessly out of tune. The music roared. It wept, setting my head on fire until it felt like a hive of buzzing bees.

So many other American musicians roamed Ireland in search of the real thing during the 1970s and 1980s, putting tape recorders in front of humble farmers who were startled and pleased that a Yank would come all this way, just to hear a few old tunes. What were we all looking for? A wise friend once pointed out that most of us came from dysfunctional families, and the web of connectedness—the sense of shared meaningful heritage in music—drew us like a magnet. In a sense, we were musical foster children.

My obsession with Irish music may have had its roots in neurosis, but it motivated me for two decades. I started as a cautious observer lurking behind my husband's elbow. Gradually, I became my own musician. I blew student loan and grant money, and inflated my credit card balance on trips to Ireland as a folklore researcher. People tell stories about the crazy things they do in the name of love. I was crazy like that. I stressed out my family with my absences. I filled up an entire hard drive writing about what I saw, what I learned, when I could have been working a real job.

These days, my passion for Irish music has become an abiding affection that lives in my memory more than my everyday life. I wonder, what was it all for? What were those years all about? I hear little of the old, wild magic in the slick music of modern Irish and Celtic bands. I long for other times, other places.

I've got a handful of fiddle students now. One boy, a neighbor, comes down the road after school for a lesson before swim practice. A doctor stops in, when she's not on call. For an hour, we push notes back and forth between us until they become a tune. I am grateful for these brief windows of time. They're the sun coming out from under the clouds, the cool green grass beneath my feet.

“I came as a stranger”: Ulrich Mack on Harkers Island ~ by Carmine Prioli

“In an expanded kind of way, Mack is one of us.”

In March 1985, German photographer Ulrich Mack was on Harkers Island, North Carolina, hand-delivering photographs he had taken the previous year, when he spent eight months capturing images of islanders in their boats, on their front porches, and in their workplaces. He did the same for people he had earlier photographed on the island of Pellworm, Germany. Commenting on his portrait of a Pellworm baker and his wife, Mack said: “I gave them their image. In return, they gave me bread. I love that. I gave them my work; they gave me theirs.”¹ Kerry Willis, at the time a portrait photographer who accompanied Mack on Harkers Island, said “most photographers just take pictures, but Mack gives them. He gives them *back*. And that’s what makes him different.”²

Mack’s photographic career spans nearly five decades. During this time, he has won awards for photojournalism and enjoyed wide recognition for his portraits of illustrious people. His subjects include musicians like Igor Stravinsky and Duke Ellington, and individual portraits of all 122 members of the 1992 Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Images of academicians, writers, and statesmen have also been the focus of his lens, along with Nobel laureate Halldor Laxness, Ernst Bloch, Lawrence Durrell, Henry Miller, Konrad Adenauer, Ludwig Erhard, Robert McNamara, Hubert H. Humphrey, John F. Kennedy, and Shimon Perez. But his 1985 visit to Harkers Island was testimony to Mack’s professional and emotional ties to common people, their work, and their communities. Welcoming him upon his 2003 visit to North Carolina, islander Karen Willis Amspacher thanked Mack for his photographs of “a disappearing place we call home,” and she added: “In an expanded kind of way, Mack is one of us.”³

“I had no plan!”

The sixth of nine children, Mack was born in the region of Thuringia in central Germany in 1934. His father was a teacher. His mother struggled during World War II to feed their children. Although she managed to keep her family alive, Gertrud Mack died soon after the war. Educated in elementary and secondary schools in Thorn and

Freiburg, Mack later worked as a coal miner in Germany's Ruhr District. Between 1956-1962, he studied design under Alfred Mahlau at the Academy for Visual Arts in Hamburg, where he also trained himself in photography. For one year during this time, he worked as a fisherman in Spain and, later, as a lumberjack in Sweden.

Mack's professional career began in 1963 as a press photographer in Munich for the magazines *Quick* and *twen*. Mistaken for an English army officer while on assignment in Tanganyika (later Tanzania) in 1964, he was taken prisoner. Along with four other journalists, Mack was nearly executed by firing squad. (He recalled that the soldiers "fired all around us."⁴) For his efforts and hazards photographing Mount Kenya's wild horses, Mack won a series of prestigious awards, including the World Press Photo Prize and, in 1967, an appointment as staff photographer for *stern*, Germany's equivalent to *Life* magazine.

As a photojournalist, Mack's work took him to many parts of the world and included covering the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War and other tumultuous events of the 1960s. While on assignment at sea, he suffered an accident that paralyzed him for six months. Following his paralysis, Mack continued recuperating on Pellworm, a North Sea island a couple of miles off Germany's north Frisian coast. (Mack's introduction to



Brenda Fulcher (31) and Belma Tunstall (24) shucking clams at Elmo Murphy's Fish House, Harkers Island. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*

Pellworm occurred when he was invited to collaborate with the poet Siegfried Lenz to record images for *stern* magazine's "The Poets and Their Paradise" series.) It was during his recuperation on Pellworm that Mack became more contemplative, more introspective. He turned his thoughts and his camera's lens from recording the fleeting moments of an often tumultuous world, to the insular, more permanent and universal qualities of human beings— island people, especially—and their natural environments. Mack insists that in the course of his life, he "had *no* plan."⁵ But his overall professional accomplishment does reveal a cyclical pattern of venturing into the rush of historic events and retreating, as he did on Pellworm, to what Heinz Spielmann calls "the miracles of the daily round."⁶

"Deep down, every man is his own island."⁷

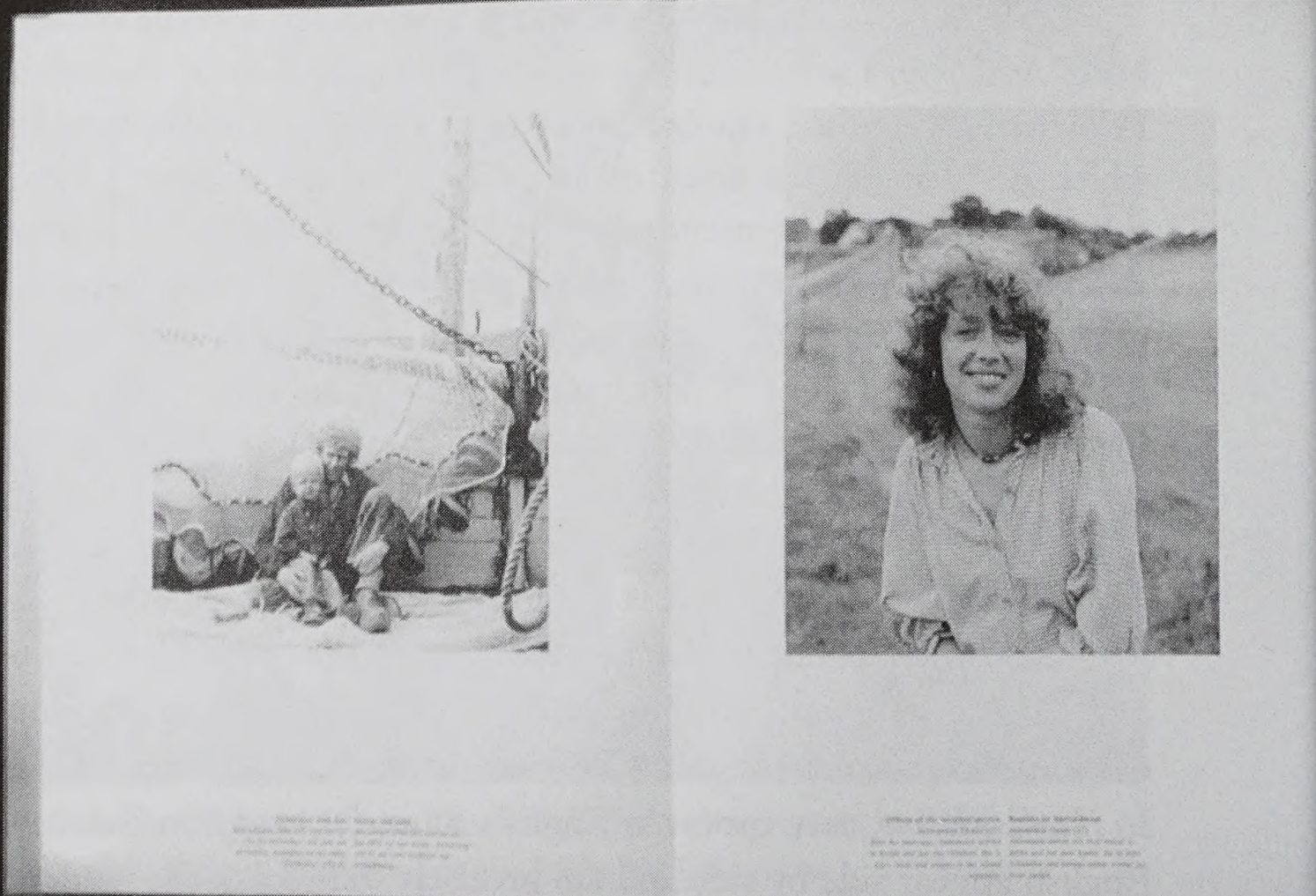
Several years after he befriended and photographically captured the people of Pellworm, Mack began searching in the United States for another place—an island—that would similarly reveal "life's essentials"⁸ ("zum Wesentlichen zurück"). The fruits of his efforts appear in the remarkable book, *Inselmenschen—Island People*, the visual record of the affinities shared by two communities separated by a "Hundred Horizons"⁹ of geographical space and history. Published in 1995, Mack's book offers powerful evidence that "life experience does more to shape a person's character than does national heritage, . . ."¹⁰

Inselmenschen is actually two books bound within a single cover. One book, *Pellworm*, focuses on the seascapes and people of the island of Pellworm. The other, *Harkers Island*, does the same for Harkers Island, which lies just off the coast of Beaufort, North Carolina. Assembled side by side, they are intended to be read as one book. The pages in *Pellworm*, the left-hand book, turn right to left in the usual fashion. The pages in *Harkers Island*, the right-hand book, turn left to right. Interestingly, the reader's first experience with this innovative picture-book is not visual. Rather, it is much more tactile than with other books, since it requires both hands to turn the pages. And the pages themselves have character: they are of high quality 150 g/m² paper stock. This gives them a "feel" that is both satisfying and substantial.

Each book contains the same five introductory essays, including one, "Points of Departure," by Eelco Wolf, an American novelist and corporation executive. In the *Pellworm* volume, the essays are in German. In *Harkers Island*, they appear in English. Since the essays in German and English appear side by side and are precisely translated, the tendency to



Sample four-page spreads from *Inselmenschen*. Photos on the left are Pellworm; those on the right are Harkers Island. Over the years, Mack has not forgotten the people whose images he recorded on film. Reunions with these people are often joyous. See, for example, the photo of Mack and ferry boat captain

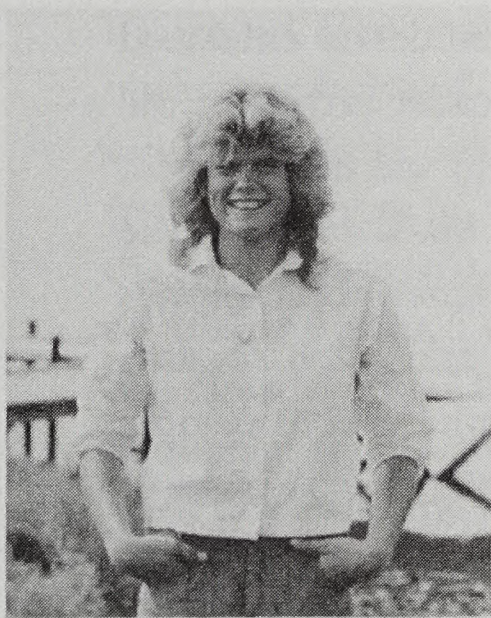




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Stacy M. Davis (above right) on p.31, and Christy Willis (below left) on p. 30. In the Summer of 2004, he also met ferry boat captain Detlef Dethlefsen (far left, top), and trawler captain Jeje Nommensen (far left, bottom, and p. 34).



alternate between the two languages is irresistible. The essays themselves are brief, ranging from two to seven pages, but they were written by individuals highly accomplished in their own rights. Overall, the essays provide meditative and, at times, nearly poetic counterpoints to the book's photographic component.¹¹

When the reader does finally arrive at the start of *Inselmenschen's* 144 photographs (which are evenly divided between Pellworm and Harkers Island), the visual experience is subtle and surprising. Each turn of the pages presents a sequence of four images with brief captions, again in German and English. Although the book does, at times, present pairs of subjects (i.e., ferry boat captains, pastors, shopkeepers), and they always appear two-by-two with Pellworm on the left and Harkers Island on the right, the images are more often randomly arranged, allowing the reader's eye and imagination to move forward or backward, left or right, comparing and contrasting whatever and whoever strikes his interest. The effect is to be intellectually immersed in the images and the worlds the pictures present. Even the linear sequence of four images gives way to an almost playful turning of the pages, as the reader alternates back and forth between Pellworm and Harkers Island, to discover one or two or three of a numerically vast number of possible sequences. When describing the effects of his work on the viewer, Mack insists: "I don't judge. I want the reader to make his or her own judgments. To see what he likes or she likes. Not what I think they should like. This is a democratic book!"¹²

This immersion into a myriad of visual possibilities is enhanced because there is no sequence to break. Once the reader arrives at the images, sequential or lockstep reading (and thinking) are discouraged. Indeed, the reader soon loses track of where he was. Mack describes the process as a "promenade"¹³ into the pictures. *Inselmenschen* accomplishes at least one other remarkable thing: it encourages, and often rewards with greater insights and spontaneous discoveries, simultaneous reading as a shared experience by two or more readers. In part, this is possible because of the book's exceptionally large format (13" x 41.5"). But it is also due to the excitement one feels, and then is compelled to share, while experiencing the book. In some measure, *Inselmenschen* is a reminder of the wonders of reading. It is an antidote to the intellectual and emotional confinements of our increasingly computerized "PgUp/PgDn" literary worlds.

“ . . . the American South had the look he was after . . . ”

The idea for *Inselmenschen* grew out of Mack's plan to produce a series of documentary portfolios or albums, with each album consisting of eighteen photos focusing on Pellworm. When Mack expanded the project to include an American island as a point of comparison, the number of albums doubled. After developing and exhibiting his Pellworm and Harkers Island albums, Mack “followed a tradition of expanding work performed for a periodical journal into a published photographic book.” John Stomberg adds that with *Inselmenschen*, Mack has,

. . . accessed the legacy of the photographic book from its heroic period—the 1920s in Germany and the 1930s in the United States—by selectively finding inspiration in practitioners such as Albert Renger-Patzsch, August Sander and Walker Evans. In doing so, he used a photographic method that matches the binational character of his project. Mack intends the book to combine the United States and Germany not only by virtue of its subject matter, but also in its approach, and he therefore draws on both German and American sources for his conception.¹⁴

When Mack determined that he wanted to document an American island in his project, he identified forty-eight communities to choose from. Most islands in the American northeast and northwest lacked the cultural and geographical combination that would offer the comparison he needed. Geographically, the rocky islands of New England resembled more the islands of Scandinavia than the lowland mud flats and marshes of Pellworm; culturally, the islands of the American northwest more resembled those of the Aleuts than those of the Europeans. Because of the region's association with the well-known documentary photography of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Margaret Bourke-White, Mack was already drawn toward the rural American South. But according to Stomberg, it was also Mack's native instinct that attracted him to the place that “had the look he was after.”¹⁵

During a brief visit to Harkers Island in 1982, Mack captured images that showed striking similarities with those he had already taken on Pellworm. When he returned to Harkers Island for an eight-month sabbatical in 1984, he came equipped with an eighty-year old 4” x 5” box camera with photographer's hood and a heavy tri-pod. Recalling Mack's equipment for an article in *Carolina Photographer*, Kerry Willis described

it “as bulky as a [shrimp boat’s] trawl board and as aggravating as an albatross”¹⁶ Despite the formidable presence of Mack’s equipment, he gained enough confidence with his Harkers Island subjects to get them to pose, more or less naturally. The result is that his photographs of people are far from candid snapshots. They are collaborations between the photographer and his subject, images taken at what was deemed the appropriate time and place, and only with available light. Because Mack was using Polaroid positive-negative film,¹⁷ he was able to show his subjects immediately how they appeared. If they did not like what they saw, the subjects themselves offered suggestions, changes were made, and the photo was taken again. “Thus enticed,” Mack notes, his subjects “cooperated in the creation of the pictures.”¹⁸ (See, for example, photos of Ann and Leslie Rose, below and opposite page.)

“This hall became a sanctuary.”

“I came as a stranger,” Mack says of his sojourns on Pellworm and Harkers Island. But on both islands, he adds, “I left as a friend.”¹⁹ So it was especially appropriate that when the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum on Harkers Island opened its educational wing on May 23, 2003, it did so with the simultaneous North Carolina opening of Mack’s



Leslie and Ann Rose as they appear in one of the 4" x 5" Positive Polaroid images that Mack took in 1984. *Photo by Ulrich Mack, courtesy of Ann Rose.*

traveling exhibit, "Island People: A Photographic Essay of Two Islands." This was the museum's first exhibit and, also appropriately, it offered a private showing on May 22, to the people of Harkers Island. The special guests were those who were photographed by Mack nineteen years earlier, or their surviving spouses, children, and grandchildren. Many of those who attended and saw the faces of their ancestors and some of the vanished places of their childhood hanging on the museum's displays felt as if they were walking on hallowed ground.

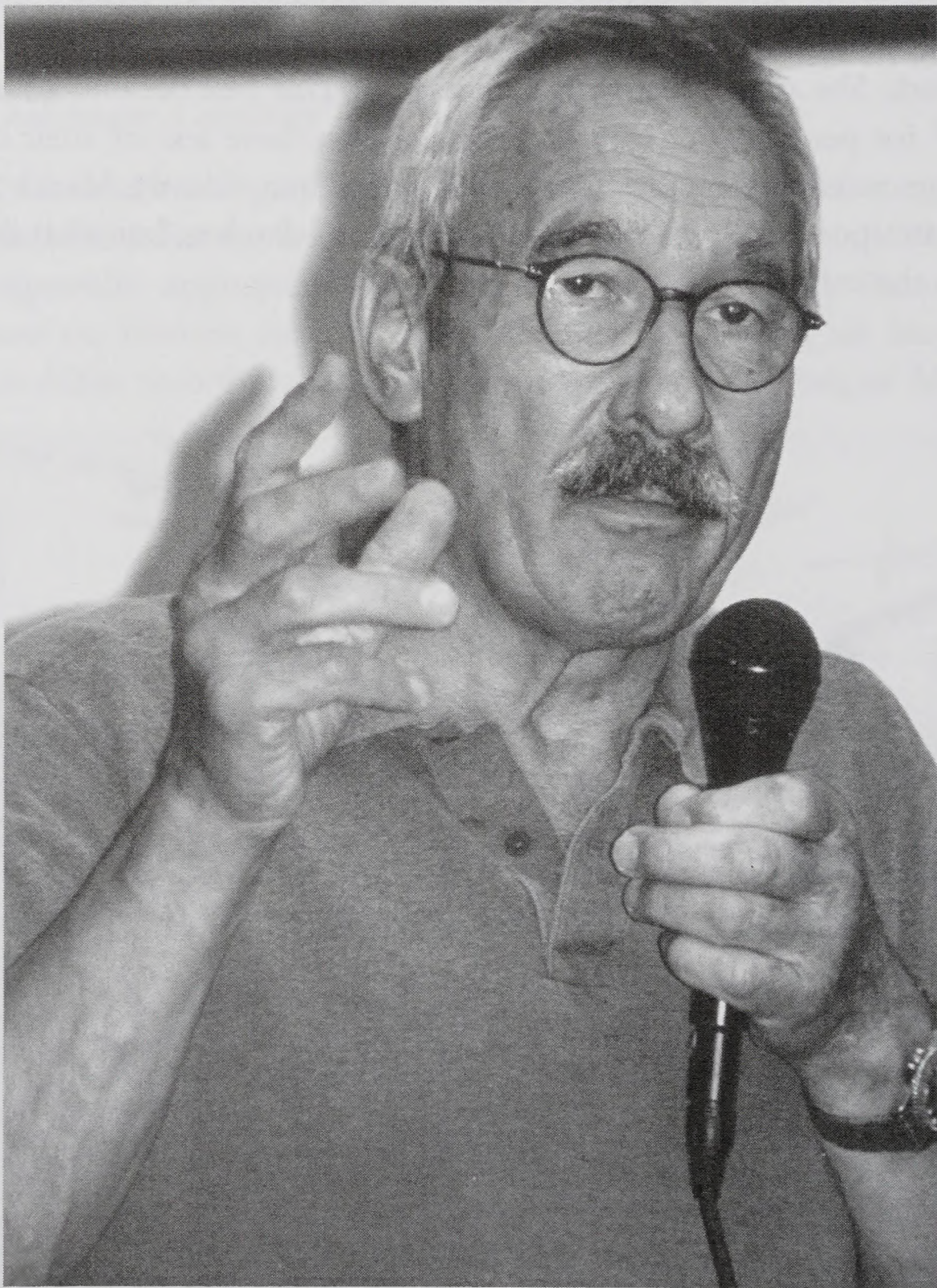
A few weeks later, Mack himself was at the museum as the guest of honor at an event that was both a reunion of old friends and a symposium on *Inselmenschen*. Island resident Susan Hancock—who is also the mother, wife, and daughter-in-law of individuals in Mack's photographs—recalled the evening of May 22, and thanked Mack publicly for his work. She noted that with his images, "This hall became a sanctuary"²⁰ for people who, with each new season, have less of their island heritage to cling to and pass on to their children. Clearly, Mack's work resonates powerfully in the hearts of Harkers Islanders, but what does it say to the rest of us?



The Roses as they appear with hands together in *Inselmenschen*. Photo by Ulrich Mack.

*“The ability to see is related to the ability to wait.”*²¹

In the “Preface” to *Inselmenschen*, Mack says that he wants his reader to pause, “to find the time to regain an ability buried beneath the flood of images swamping us daily: the ability to ‘read’ pictures.” Always sensitive to the larger dimensions of human experience, Mack invites us as well “to discover new relationships and contrasts between two islands of the Old and New World, united and separated by the Atlantic Ocean.” *Inselmenschen* successfully bridges two cultures and two worlds. It therefore compels us as folklorists to discover and record not only the qualities that make people or communities unique, but also those quali-



Ulrich Mack addressing the audience during the symposium on *Inselmenschen* at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum. Photo by Carmine Prioli, 2003.

ties that are common among people everywhere. *Inselmenschen* reassures us of the immense value and importance of our own labors as we document and photograph the people and places close to us. Further, *Inselmenschen* is an eloquent expression of the dictate to offer the fruits of our efforts in imaginative and accessible ways to the wider public who justify our existence and help define us as folklorists. But in a broader sense, *Inselmenschen* reminds us that we live within what Cathy Larson Sky calls a “web of connectedness”²² that binds us to world communities far distant from our own, and within a continuously unfolding saga of human history and nature’s relentless forces.

Endnotes

¹ Mack’s comments were made at the Symposium on his photography that took place at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum on Harkers Island, North Carolina, on June 27, 2003.

² Symposium, June 27, 2003. Willis grew up on Harkers Island. He is now a minister in West Virginia. (See photo of Willis and his wife, bottom right, p. 13.)

³ Amspacher’s comments were presented as part of a program that included a slide lecture by Mack at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, June 22, 2003.

⁴ Interview, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, June 20, 2003.

⁵ Interview, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, June 20, 2003, and Symposium, June 27, 2003.

⁶ Spielmann, “Ulrich Mack at Sixty,” in Mack, *Mack • 60 • Photographien*, p. 7.

⁷ Lenz, in *Inselmenschen*, np.

⁸ Mack, “Preface,” *Inselmenschen*, np.

⁹ Prieser, “Neighbours by the Sea, . . .” in Mack, *Inselmenschen*, np.

¹⁰ Stomberg, “Ulrich Mack’s *Island People*, in Mack, *Island People—Inselmenschen*, p. 18.

¹¹ The authors and their essays appear in the following order: (1) Rüdiger Joppien (museum curator): “Encounters;” (2) Heinz Spielmann (museum director): “Type vs. Individual: Ulrich Mack’s Island Portraits;” (3) Eelco Wolf (novelist and corporation executive): “Points of Departure;” (4) Uwe Prieser (sports reporter and freelance writer): “Neighbours by the Sea, Separated by a Hundred Horizons: Harkers Island and Pellworm;” (5) Siegfried Lenz (novelist and poet): “What we Grasp is only a Part of the Whole.”

¹² Interviews, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, June 20, 2003, and Hamburg, Germany, July 21, 2004. John Stomberg calls this freedom of choice “a subtle but significant reflection of the democratic principle” in Mack’s work. Stomberg also asserts that the random fashion with which the reader becomes acquainted with the subjects “replicates Mack’s own gradual introduction to the residents of the two islands” (Stomberg, 16; 22).

¹³ Interview, Hamburg, Germany, July 21, 2004.

¹⁴ Stomberg, p. 18.

¹⁵ Stomberg, p. 28.

¹⁶ Willis, p. 21. Mack's camera during the Pellworm period (1978-1981) was a Polaroid 600 SE, with 75 mm, 127 mm, and 150 mm lenses. He used 3" x 4" Polaroid Positive-Negative Material Type 665 film. On Harkers Island in 1984, he used a Mahogany Camera with Staebble Multifocus Set Plasmat lenses. His film was 4" x 5" Polaroid Positive-Negative Material Type 55. Enlargements and prints were done on AGFA Record-Rapid and AGFA Multicontrast Classic Paper.

¹⁷ Unlike the Polaroid film that is popular with amateur photographers and that produces only a positive image, the positive-negative film Mack used also provided a negative that he could then bring back to the darkroom for printing.

¹⁸ Mack, *Inselmenschen*, "Preface," np.

¹⁹ Mack made this comment several times in interviews and during the Symposium. In addition, the following inscription appears in the exhibit catalogue: "To the people of Pellworm and Harkers Island/to whom I came as a stranger and left as a friend."

²⁰ Symposium, June 27, 2003.

²¹ Lenz, "What we Grasp is only a Part of the Whole," in *Inselmenschen*, np. Lenz adds: "To accompany Ulrich Mack is to attend school on the art of seeing. He shows that before a person can discover something he must make his own contribution: imagination, and love, and a sensitivity to what is hidden and evanescent."

²² See "Our Web of Connectedness" in this issue, pp. 7-8.

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Fisherman and boat builder, Hallas Clyde Rose (57). Mack's caption reads: *"Wherever he goes, Hallas praises the Lord with his voice and his instrument, here at Vergie Mae Cemetery."* Photo by Ulrich Mack.

Reflections on Ulrich Mack's Inselmenschen–Island People*

~ by David Cecelski

I want to thank you all for inviting me to join in your celebration of this beautiful new museum's opening and its inaugural photography exhibit, Ulrich Mack's "Island People." I must confess that my idea of a scholarly conference cannot get much better than the community potluck supper last night. Looking at those heaping plates full of chicken and dumplings, garden fresh butterbeans, and homemade blackberry cobbler, I suddenly felt a powerful intellectual calling to do far more scholarly work on Harkers Island. I feel a big book coming, one that might take many, many years of study and writing! I want to thank you, too, for making my mother and my children feel so welcome last night. We have had the opportunity to share a delicious dinner, gotten a first glimpse of this wonderful museum, and tomorrow we will join a number of you for a morning on Cape Lookout. Our blessings overflow here on Harkers Island, and we could not be more grateful.

Today I want to say a few words about Mack's photographs from an historian's perspective. I know that they speak for themselves in artistic terms. They are unforgettable, beautiful, often moving images of the residents of two island worlds—Harkers Island, North Carolina, and Pellworm, Germany—rendered with great care and craftsmanship. And I know Mack must be an extraordinary person by the way you have welcomed him with this homecoming and exhibit. Because my focus is primarily historical, I see Mack's work first and foremost as a precious, unforgettable rendering of what Harkers Island was like two decades ago.

All of you who live Down East, and even those of us who live on the other side of the North River bridge, know all too well how much of our coastal past has already vanished and is irretrievably lost. I have spent much of my life traveling across coastal North Carolina listening to and preserving its oldest residents' stories, but I only have to think about my own family and neighbors whom I have lost to feel haunted by the stories that have been lost with them. As most of you know, I grew up twenty miles from here. On the farm next to us lived a very dear, elderly lady named Beatrice Mason. "Miss Beadie," we called her.

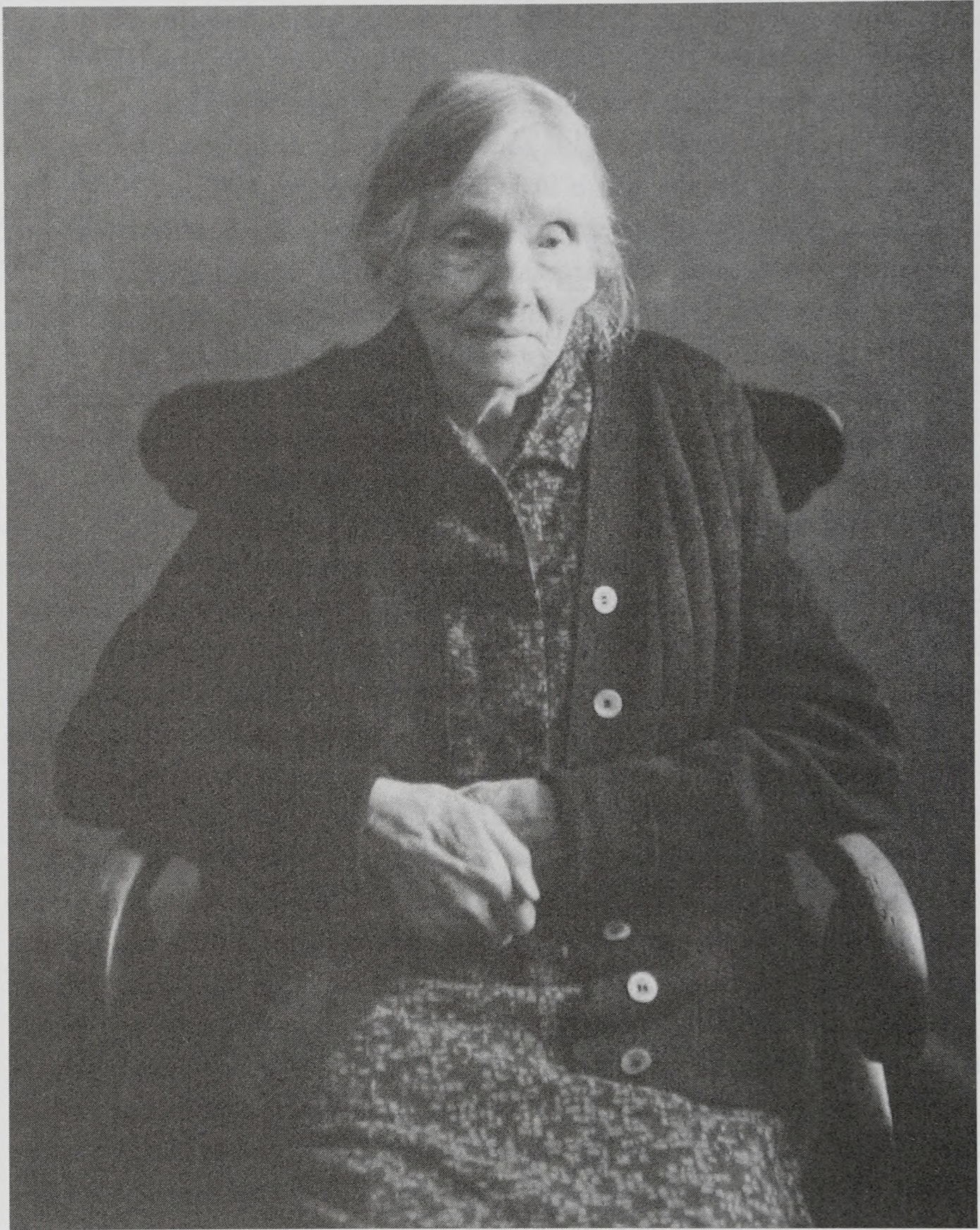
**An earlier version of this essay was presented as part of a symposium on the traveling exhibit, Inselmenschen–Island People, at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum, Harkers Island, North Carolina, June 27, 2003. The museum officially opened its doors to the public on May 23, 2003.*

She would often sit on her front porch and tell me stories about her younger days in the 1900s and 1910s. I will never forget how, one afternoon when we were rocking on her porch swing, she told me about the typhoid fever epidemic that hit the farming and fishing community of Oyster Creek when she was a little girl, probably in 1903 or 1904. (I'm not talking about the Oyster Creek east of here, on the other side of Davis, mind you, but another place of the same name west of here off the Newport River.) Miss Beadie said that so many people at Oyster Creek were dead or convalescent that nobody was left to care for the sick. People in the neighboring communities, like ours, were terrified that the disease would spread to their children and, in effect, left Oyster Creek's people in quarantine. Only her mother, Miss Beadie told me, dared to go into Oyster Creek to help.

That day I meant to ask Miss Beadie more—what did her mother see at Oyster Creek? What could she do to help? How many didn't make it? But something distracted us and we never did get back to the subject of the typhoid epidemic. And before I knew it, a year shy of her hundredth birthday, Miss Beadie passed on. I made inquiries of our other elderly neighbors, but Miss Beadie was the last person who remembered the Oyster Creek epidemic. Today there is probably not a handful of people who can even tell you where Oyster Creek was. The community has vanished. In such ways I have learned—as I know most of you have too—that our past slips away surprisingly fast sometimes. And that is why, in coming decades and for future generations, Mack's photographs will be cherished for what they recall of a distant time and place.

Matching up the photographs from Pellworm and Harkers Island makes one think immediately of the sea and how it has shaped these island people from the far sides of the Atlantic. You can look at the photograph of Jenny Nommensen, the eighty-nine year-old fisherman's widow in Pellworm, and the local photograph of Nettie Brooks, a year older and a fisherman's widow herself, and recognize in both the lines that an island life have left on their faces. Compared to the hectic, crowded, and industrialized world, islands like Pellworm and Harkers Island inevitably stand apart in their isolation, remoteness, and their reliance on fishing and the sea. The wind, tides, and weather still matter, and they shape a person in ways that those "from off" can rarely appreciate or understand. You can see all of this in Mack's portraits.

The essential element of Mack's genius was simply his idea of pairing the two islands. What a simple and elegant way to make a point that



Jenny Nommensen (89). Pellworm. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*

is increasingly central to our understanding of world history—that the maritime communities of the world have for centuries shared a life in common and an inter-connectedness that transcends national boundaries and, too, makes them in many ways more akin to one another than to communities inland. North Carolina’s coastal communities had a similar closeness to other parts of the Eastern Seaboard. A visitor to Beaufort said as much in the nineteenth century. “The fact is,” John E. Edwards recalled, “Beaufort in those days, was as nearly out of the world



Nettie M. Brooks (90). Harkers Island. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*

as a town could well be. Communication with New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore was more direct and frequent than with New Bern.”¹ So it was, too, that, in my book on African American sailors, fishermen, pilots, and boatmen here on the North Carolina coast during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I found those maritime laborers to be key actors in passing abolitionist politics and cultural ideas to slave communities up and down the state’s waterways, as well as in connecting the slave communities on our coast with those in the ports of other

Southern states, New England, the West Indies, and even Europe and Africa.² It would be a stretch to draw such direct ties between Pellworm and Harkers Island, but Mack's *Inselmenschen—Island People* pushes us to think about our own coast's historic ties to the larger world.

We do not usually envision Harkers Island or other parts of the North Carolina coast as being particularly worldly or cosmopolitan places. I may be wrong, but I suspect that every one of the many folklorists, historians, sociologists, and linguists who have visited Harkers Island in the last thirty years have, with good reason, emphasized the distinctive things about your community—your brogue, your ties to Core Banks and Shackleford, and your boat building heritage, among many other things. But Mack's photographs prompt us to remember that the sea has always tied North Carolina's coastal people to a broader Atlantic world. We know, for instance, that many of the Down East and Beaufort families most renowned for their boat building, fishing, and seafaring originally came from maritime communities in New England and New York. If we go way back, we see that many of the earliest coastal settlers arrived with ships' crews visiting the whaling and fishing grounds off Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout. The Chadwicks right here at the Straits, for instance, first landed with Yankee whalers in the 1710s.

More recently, Down East culture has been infused with the sea-salt blood of Yankee sailors and watermen, especially those from Maine,



Fisherman Rodney Rose (29). Harkers Island. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*

Massachusetts, and Long Island Sound. After the Civil War, when northern inshore fishing grounds had already been depleted and there was a swelling demand for seafood across the United States (as well as new technologies available to preserve it, especially ice making and steam canning), a great wave of old New England, New York, and New Jersey coastal families moved south so that they could continue to make a living working the water.

As many of you know, northern fishing companies opened the first menhaden plants here immediately after the Civil War in remote places like Ocracoke, Davis Shore, and Diamond City. Even the first oyster canneries were originally branch plants of companies based on the Chesapeake Bay. Over the generations, the influence of these fishermen, boat builders, and saltwater tradesmen could be seen in nearly every facet of waterfront life. Just to mention a few examples—perhaps the most classic Down East workboat of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the beautiful, elegant sharpie, originally evolved on Long Island Sound, near New Haven, Connecticut, and wasn't adopted on Core Sound until the 1870s. The first pound nets also came from fishing communities along Long Island Sound, the first long-handled oyster tongs from the Chesapeake Bay, and the first purse seines from Rhode Island. All came to be symbols of Down East maritime culture. Of course, Down East people adapted these boats and fishing gear to their own needs, especially to the unique circumstances of fishing and shipping on local shoal waters, and gradually transformed them until they had a distinctively Down East character. But these innovations also remind us that Down Easterners were always a seagoing people and part of something bigger than the stretch of coastal marshes from Otway to Cedar Island.

But the sea did not only connect the outside world to Down East; it also connected Down East to the outside world. So we are reminded, as well, that the fishermen from Down East and other parts of Carteret County have been traveling up and down the Eastern Seaboard for many generations. On my own trips to the Everglades, I have long noticed that there are several fishing villages on the Gulf Coast of Florida where you will meet people with some suspiciously similar surnames—Guthrie, Lewis, Willis, Gillikin, among others. Our local boys fished and shrimped offshore from those villages in the 1920s and 1930s. Not surprisingly, some of them fell in love with local girls and never returned home except for daddy's and momma's funerals.

Then, too, from the 1920s into the 1960s, and in some cases well beyond, the island's trawling fleet followed the shrimp south every win-

ter. All along the seaboard, coastal people came to recognize the sight of the Harkers Island trawlers with their distinctive dead-rise bows and curved sterns (and they weren't always glad to see the competition). The arrival of the Harkers Island boats became an annual ritual, especially in places like Southport, Georgetown, Fernandina Beach, and Key West, the fleet's main ports away from home. Likewise, in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, local pogie crews made second homes in the great menhaden ports from Reidsville, Virginia, to Cape May, New Jersey. And later, when the menhaden industry shifted to the south, those fishing crews ventured all the way to the



Heinrich "Rubber Henry" von Holdt (52). Pellworm. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*

Gulf Coast for six months and more a year, making a living—and often a name for themselves—in places like Houma, Biloxi, Morgan City, Apalachicola, and Galveston. These fishermen left their mark on all those ports—for better and for worse, I imagine—soaking in the local maritime ways and bringing many of them home.

Renowned for their boatmanship, the watermen's families from Down East and the Outer Banks have for generations been a mainstay in the U.S. Navy, Coast Guard, Merchant Marine, the U.S. Geodetic Survey, and the Army Corps of Engineers. (A Wilmington gentleman who served aboard one of the old lightships in the 1950s recently told



Louie "Blacky" C. Willis (53). Harkers Island. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*

me that the state's watermen used to be so pervasive in the Coast Guard that they jokingly called it "the North Carolina Navy."³) In short, they did everything that needed to be done by seamen, and they performed with distinction far beyond their home waters. They were "raised up to it," of course, and in the days when an island could seem awfully claustrophobic to a young man, and when times making a living fishing were even harder than they are today, going to sea one way or another seemed natural for a local boy. A fellow from the Carolina coast could near' about write his own ticket, such was their reputation abroad.

Horace Twiford, a retired merchant marine and fisherman who lives at Sailor's Snug Harbor up at Sea Level now but was originally from Manteo, told me that when he first left home as a teenager during World War II, all he had to do was say where he was from and he instantly got a job on a pilot's boat in Norfolk Harbor.⁴ The truth was, he didn't know a thing about piloting, Horace told me, but that was the reputation of the Outer Bankers in that day and time, and in places a lot farther away than Norfolk.

Next thing Horace knew, he was aboard a merchant ship zigzagging across the Atlantic with German U-boats in his wake, the beginning of a long career that, as for many local boys, eventually exposed him to things he would never have seen back home. In Horace's case, witnessing the caste system of India and apartheid in South Africa inspired in him a lifelong commitment to standing up for the little guy. Other local watermen's families with ties to the Chesapeake Bay or Long Island Sound have never really relinquished those ties. For generations, the Gillikin boys of Smyrna served as pilots in New York harbor. They grew up Down East, left home to work in New York for their entire professional careers (coming back home for Christmas, a little duck hunting, and to make babies), then settled back on Jarrett's Bay upon their retirement. These are just a handful of the far-flung ways that coastal people here are connected to coastal people all along the Atlantic

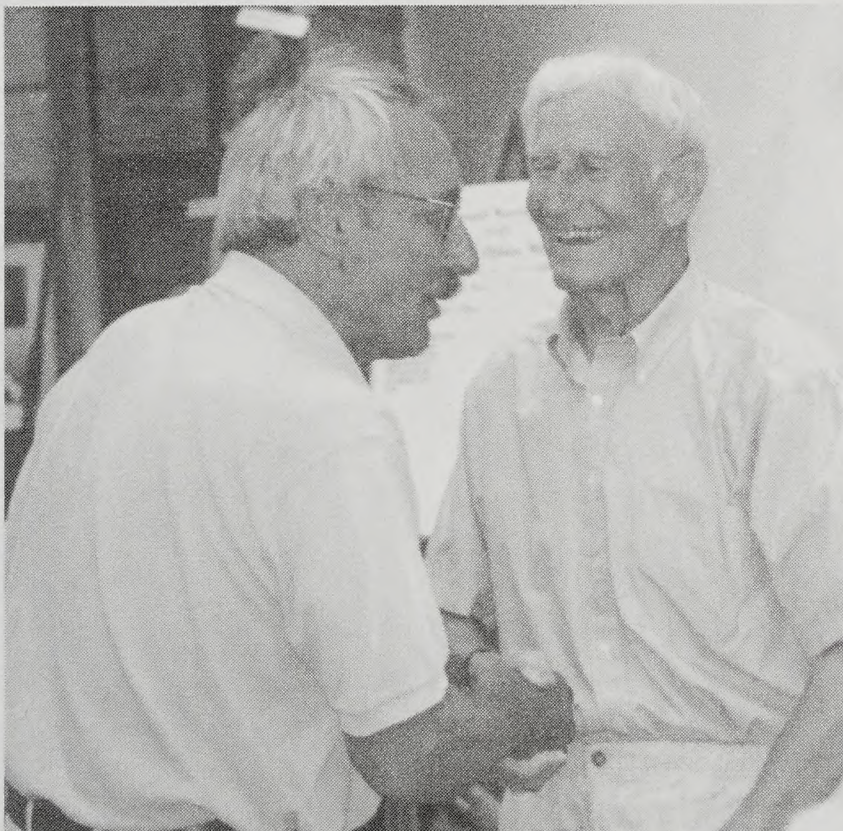


Mack and Christy Willis. Harkers Island. See p.13, bottom left. *Photo by Carmine Prioli, 2003.*

seaboard and beyond. We owe a great debt to Ulrich Mack for helping us to recognize ourselves as part of a world beyond our Atlantic coast, a world of “island people.” His photographs invite us to explore this broader Atlantic world that shaped us as we shaped it.

I would like to close my comments by saying a few words that have nothing to do with my historical point of view on Mack’s images, but that are merely personal in nature. If you were not here last night during the community potluck supper, you missed seeing the assembly of many of the people Mack photographed twenty years ago. They returned to see him and to see themselves or their family members in his photographs. There was much rejoicing, much laughter, and more than a few tears. I don’t believe any of us could look at all those people and this exhibit or his book side by side and not think about the passage of time and the fragility of the people and places we love. One of my favorite Mack photographs depicts Joel and Susan Hancock’s four daughters—young girls at the time—smiling and framed by the rear window of their family’s Chevy station wagon (see back cover). Emily, Joella, Alyson, and Leah are grown women now, and they’ve moved on in the world. But one—Emily—was here last night with her newborn baby.

And, of course, there are all the people in Mack’s photographs who are now gone. They are almost too many to name: Dallas Rose, Nettie Brooks, Vance Fulford I could go on and on. Burgess Lewis is not here to build boats any longer, and many a day has passed since Miss



Mack and retired ferry boat captain, Stacy M. Davis. Harkers Island. See p. 13, top right.. *Photo by Carmine Prioli, 2003.*

Mattie Brooks was seen raking clams the way she is depicted in Mack’s photograph. And famed raconteur Charlie Jones isn’t telling stories on this earth any more, though I imagine many of you suspect the angels in heaven are getting an earful.

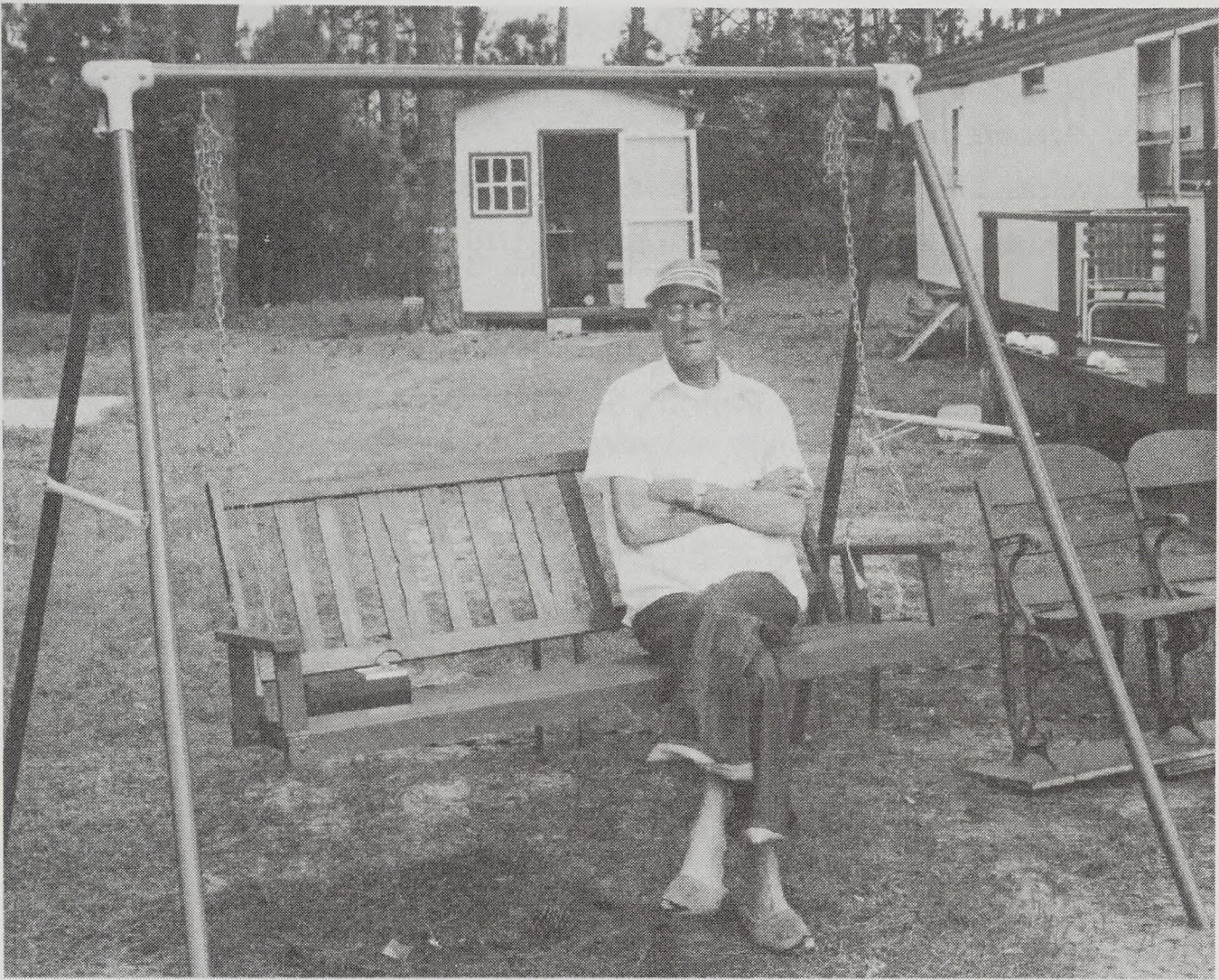
I hardly need to say that Harkers Island itself has changed a great deal, even in the few years since Mack first carried that antique-looking camera and tripod of his across the bridge. Under

the caption to Mack's photograph of Horace Jones sitting in the swing by his trailer, he wrote, "Horace sold his seaside plot and moved with his trailer into one of the island's trailer parks."⁵ That seemed an odd enough thing when Mack was here in 1984 to be worthy of comment. These days, of course, an awful lot of the island's old family homes have been sold and become summer rentals or second homes for the "off island" crowd, bless their hearts. The beach itself where Madge Guthrie, Wanda Willis, and her daughter, Karen, and the island children used to roam at all hours is gone, too, lost to the breakwaters built by the new owners to protect their property. Most of the net shops, boat yards, and general stores that are the background for so many of Mack's portraits are also gone. If any of those buildings are still standing, they probably sell miniature souvenir lighthouses and model boats.

I suspect that, deep down, Harkers Island has changed more on the outside than on the inside, if you know what I mean. Nevertheless, I am still a little overwhelmed by the impermanence of the old ways and the entire way of life that is receding from us like the ebb tide on a full moon. How can our lives be so fragile, I sometimes wonder, our days so short, our time so abbreviated, that a photographer can come here only



Mattie Brooks (67). Harkers Island. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*



Horace Wallace Jones (65). Harkers Island. *Photo by Ulrich Mack.*

twenty years ago and his record of that time is now another world? It can disappear. There is just no denying it at this point. It can all be lost.

And that realization, that understanding, is a powerful reminder about what is so important not only about Mack's work, but also about the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum's calling to hold onto the old stories and to preserve the everyday relics of Down East life. These stories and artifacts of days gone by connect us to those who have come before, and they will give future generations a chance to discover who they are and from where they came.

We ought not to need reminders of our mortality or the dearness of life, but Mack's photographs make me want to do more than hold onto the old stories. They make me want to reach for the ones I love and hold onto them, too. They make me want to reach out to all my neighbors, friends and strangers alike, while I still can. They make me wonder, finally, if we will make our own lives ones that a pilgrim like Ulrich Mack might one day see and exclaim, and say, "Ah, these people, in this place, in this time, . . . they are leaving us something worth remembering. They are showing us something that is worth holding onto forever."

Endnotes

¹ John E. Edwards, "Reminiscences of Beaufort in 1839," in *Raleigh Christian Advocate*, July 19, 1882.

² Cecelski, David S. *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina*. Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

³ Interview with Joe Floyd, Wilmington, NC, December 5, 2003.

⁴ Interview with Horace Twiford, Sea Level, NC, May 19, 2000.

⁵ Mack, *Inselmenschen*, p. 29.

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Mack and trawler captain, Jeje Nommensen. Pellworm. See p. 12, bottom left. Jeje is the grandson of Jenny Nommensen. *Photo by Elizabeth Prioli, 2004.*

Bluegrass Meltdown:

Mountain Music, Rock and Roll, and Family Tradition in the music of Ralph Lewis and the Sons of Ralph*

~ by Burgin Mathews

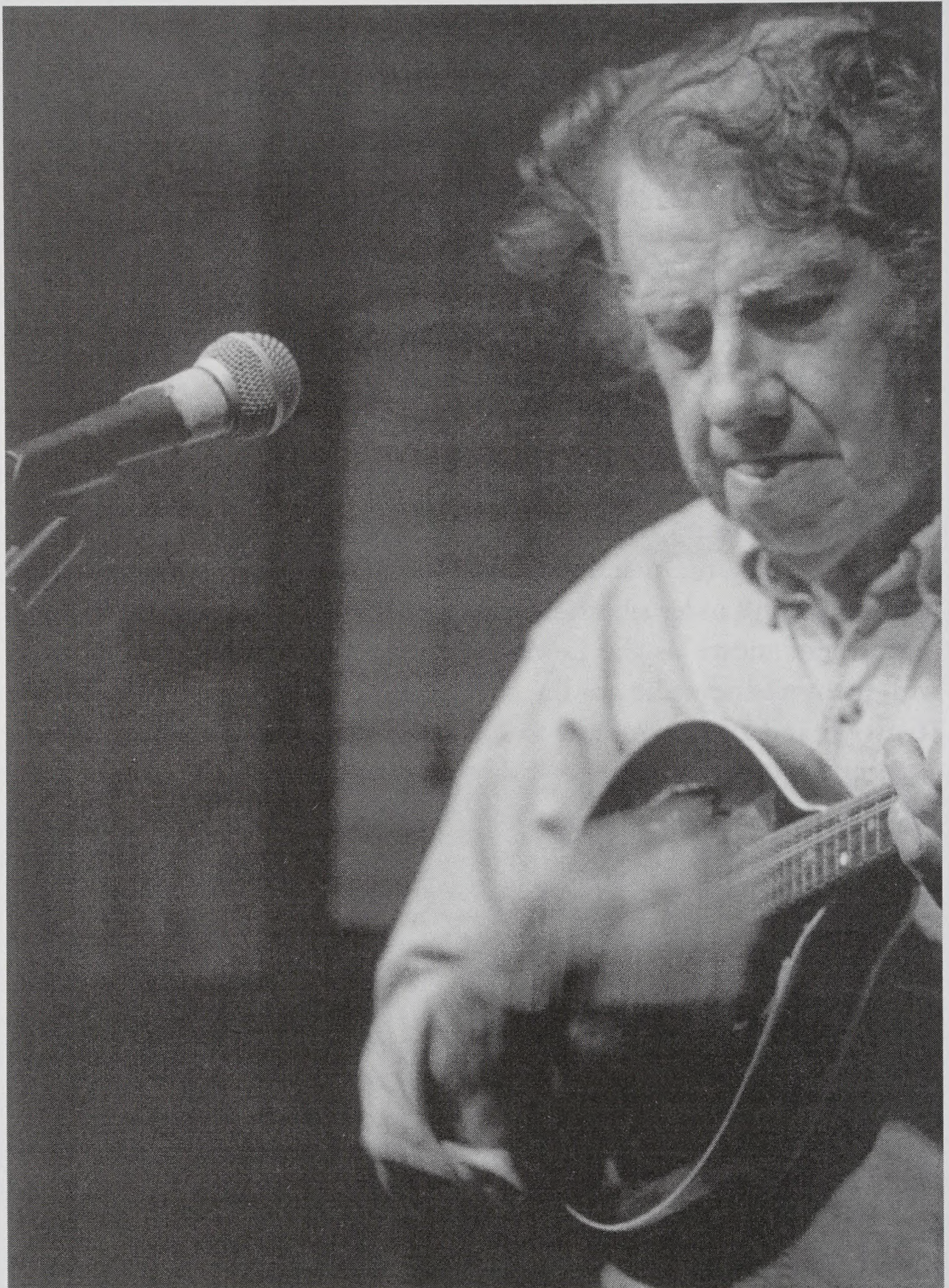
"Our belief is that if you do the same numbers the same way over and over, you're going to get stale, and your listening public is going to get stale with you."

~ Ralph Lewis, October 13, 2002

Ralph Lewis was born in 1928, the seventh son of a seventh son, in Madison County, North Carolina. By the age of four, he was learning to play the mandolin alongside a family of active musicians. Two of Ralph's older siblings, Ervin and Blanco, were popular regional performers known as the Lewis Brothers, and the young Ralph sat in with them whenever he got the chance. Around the start of World War II, Ervin and Blanco moved to Niagara Falls. Soon thereafter, Blanco entered the service and was killed in action. "That left my oldest brother there," Ralph recalls, "... just a solo act. So I pulled up, at fifteen years old, and went to New York, and joined him in a brother act."¹ Later, the brothers moved to Detroit—a common destination for job-seeking Southerners in the 1940s—and they continued to perform at clubs on the weekends, while working day jobs and starting families. Ralph had married Imogene Rice, a girl from back home, and after a few years in Detroit they and their first daughter, Weylenn, moved back to Madison County. Ralph opened a heating and refrigeration business in Marshall (he owns it to this day) and started his own bluegrass radio show, "Dinnertime Country Style," on a local station.

Ralph had known bluegrass pioneer Bill Monroe since his childhood. The original Lewis Brothers were contemporaries of the Monroe Brothers, Bill and Charlie, often playing the same radio stations and developing a mutual admiration and friendship from their interactions. In 1974, Monroe hired Ralph as lead guitarist and singer for his band, the Bluegrass Boys. Over the next two years, the group toured Europe and Japan, recorded an LP, and performed regularly at Monroe's longtime gig, the *Grand Ole Opry*. Lewis retired from the road in 1976 to be closer to his family. His two young sons, Marty and Don, were developing into

*An earlier version of this article received the North Carolina Folklore Society's 2003 Cratis D. Williams Graduate Student Essay Award.



Ralph Lewis at Jack of the Wood, Asheville, NC. *Photo by Colleen Cook, 2003.*

talented musicians in their own right—Don was a natural-born fiddler, and guitarist Marty was writing songs by the time he was fourteen—and Ralph wanted to encourage the boys’ musical interests. Today, the Sons of Ralph, Featuring Ralph, has a large and devoted fan base in Asheville. The band, which also features “adopted” sons Richard Foulk and Gary Wiley on drums and electric bass, combines Ralph and the boys’ mountain music heritage with the newer, louder influences and impulses of

rock and roll, blending a diverse range of sounds from Cajun fiddling to reggae rhythms and even hip-hop.² In 2001, they released their first CD, *Grab a Root and Growl*, a mix of original tunes and bluegrass standards ruthlessly reworked. In 2003, the Sons released two more albums, one live and the other entirely acoustic. Now there is talk of a DVD.

The Sons of Ralph's hybrid, high-energy music is the result of a distinctly family-based collaboration, the old-time and bluegrass traditions of the father passed down to his sons. Significantly, though, musical traditions are not simply passed "down." They are transferred back and forth between the two generations of Lewises, resulting in a unique, wide-open amalgam of sounds and styles. The Sons of Ralph, with their electric instruments, drums, and pop-cultural, eclectic influences, take their traditional roots to regions beyond the radars of some bluegrass "purists" or conservative folklorists, but their music remains grounded firmly within the local and familial culture of both generations of Lewises. Indeed, for students of traditional culture, the Sons of Ralph's music demonstrates the continuing vitality of Western North Carolina's mountain musical traditions, representing both the long continuities and the ongoing innovations within the region's distinct musical heritage. While many active performers of mountain music reproduce precisely the sounds of old styles and early pioneers, the Sons of Ralph approach tradition as something both time-honored yet flexible, and their artistry reflects the range of possibilities within a music that bridges two millennia. The creations of Ralph Lewis and his sons provide an exciting, highly personal vision of the past, present, and future of a local musical heritage, engaging a conversation across generations and genres and complicating, masterfully, our notions of "old-time" or "traditional" music.

The Musical Background

Western North Carolina—and, in particular, the Lewis' own Madison County—enjoys a long-standing and well-deserved reputation for its music. When, in the first decades of the twentieth century, British folksong collector Cecil Sharpe visited the "Laurel Country" of Madison County, he commented, with perhaps a little enthusiastic exaggeration, that "singing was as common and almost as universal a practice as speaking" in the area.³ Though Sharpe's interest was in the old British ballads, string music also prevailed in the mountains. As the "hillbilly" music industry began to develop in the 1920s, groups from Madison and surrounding counties made significant contributions to the market through radio appearances and commercial recordings. During the

1930s, “brother groups”—usually duets—like the Lewis Brothers, were particularly popular, and the region produced many successful sibling acts. Wiley and Zeke Morris of Black Mountain, the Callahan Brothers of Madison County, Mainer’s Mountaineers of Buncombe County, and the Sauceman Brothers of east Tennessee all lived and performed in the area, and all were friends of the Lewis family.

Ralph Lewis was born into the midst of this environment. “It was music every weekend,” he remembers, “and sometimes . . . two or three, four nights a week.” Ralph’s brothers and other groups played regularly at schools, courthouses, skating rinks—“any building that would be accessible.” When Ervin and Blanco did not have other weekend gigs, Lewis remembers that they would put on a mock radio show at Ralph’s home for the whole neighborhood, drawing anywhere from twenty-five to 250 people. Ralph himself joined his brothers whenever he could, striking a deal with his teachers that he could make up his lessons if he needed to miss school for a day or two while playing. In addition to the family musicians, Ralph played with well-known family friends like the Sauceman Brothers, the Morris Brothers, and Wade Mainer.

While Ralph grew up within a rich regional tradition, he also witnessed the interaction of that tradition with an increasingly national culture of country music, the music of his home mixing with the sounds of distant traditions heard on radio and recordings. For a time, Ralph’s family had one of a very few radios in the area, and visitors would often fill the house in the evenings to listen to the music. The Lewises also owned a phonograph, and Ralph came under the spell of such widely popular recording artists as the Monroe and Delmore Brothers.

Ralph’s own brothers, meanwhile, regularly appeared on Asheville radio’s WWNC *Saturday Night Roundup*, and they often traveled to perform at other stations in the region. Although they did not make records like some of their local contemporaries, the Lewis Brothers did attract a wide following through the far-reaching influence of the radio. “In those days,” Ralph points out, “radio personalities were actually more famous than the movie stars were.”

Radio stardom—and the reputation and money it afforded—also represented a higher style of living to a young farm boy like Ralph. “I don’t care what the group was,” he remembers, “they always had nice clothes, a new car, and that was unheard of in the Depression. Having a new car and wearing good clothes—[even] lawyers didn’t do that!” Before the influx of radio stations all over the map and across the dial—a frequency-crowding boom that did not occur until after World War II—local

stations like WWNC exerted a broad geographic influence, expanding the audiences of groups like the Lewis Brothers far beyond their immediate locales. Testifying to the expansive reach of early radio, Ralph recalls tuning in to live programs on WWNC when he moved to Niagara Falls in the early 1940s and receiving perfectly clear reception.

Marty and Don Lewis grew up, years later, in an environment equally rich in music. In 1974, Ralph joined Bill Monroe's band. Marty and Don were twelve and nine at the time. Whenever they could, they joined the band on the road, and their early memories reflect childhoods lived largely at festivals, backstage at the *Grand Ole Opry*, and on the Bluegrass Boys' tour bus. Monroe worked out a routine with the boys, who would walk on stage after the band played the song "Uncle Pen" and try to get Monroe's attention.

In a few minutes he'd look down and said, "Who are you boys?"

They said, "We're the Lewis Brothers."

He said, "Well, what do you do?"

They said, "We make music, play music."

He said, "What kind of music you play?"

They said, "Bluegrass music!"

He says, "You want to pick one here tonight?"

They said, "Yeah, that's what we come out here for!"

He said, "Whose tune you gonna play?"

And they said, "Stanley Brothers!"⁴

Whether on or off the road, Ralph's sons were surrounded by music. During their childhoods, their dad held regular "pickin' parties" at the house, drawing musicians from all over the neighborhood. "You'd have twenty people picking in a living room," Don recalls of these gatherings. Before they could even play instruments of their own, Marty and Don would pretend to play along on tennis rackets and brooms. "I just remember not being able to sleep a lot of times," Don says, "unless I heard music. It was opposite of some kid, I guess, where they need quiet or something. I slept better with some music going on." The Lewis home was not only a gathering place for local musicians: it was a frequent layover for many professional bluegrass players who would drop by and pick for a night during their touring. Marty and Don also remember their mother singing ballads around the home. "Our mom," says Don, "got a dose of the ballad-singing thing. . . . Ballad singing being just whenever you sing yourself, back in Madison County, just to pass the

time washing the dishes or hanging up clothes or something. I'd hear her up in there singing."

As Marty and Don grew older, they also came to absorb the popular sounds of their own generation's mainstream culture: like their father, they listened eagerly to radio and records, enjoying with their peers from school the broad offerings of the media. "As the eighties came along," Don recalls, "we were into everything. We were like any average teenager in the eighties; I can't say that I wasn't influenced by Yes, or the Allman Brothers Band, or anything like that, too. It's all there." "We always had good hand-me-downs from our sisters," Marty adds, remembering in particular the passed-down Beatles albums. Not surprisingly, one of the brothers' favorite records was an album of Beatles songs performed by a Massachusetts bluegrass group, the Charles River Valley Boys.

Ralph's own openness to diverse musical styles also contributed to his sons' development as music fans and performers, and to the eventual development of the Sons of Ralph as a group. When Marty and Don were younger, Ralph would bring home records from the flea market—"Blood, Sweat, and Tears, or Steppenwolf, or whatever," Don says—and give them to the kids, who would listen to and try to play along with anything that came their way. If Ralph's chosen music was bluegrass, his interests and taste were unbound by considerations of genre or style. "One of his favorite people," according to Don, "is Kurt Cobain," the late lead singer for the 1990s grunge-rock band, Nirvana.

An Ongoing Experiment: The Sons of Ralph, Featuring Ralph

In 1976, after two years on the road, Ralph left the Bluegrass Boys to play music with his sons. Ralph and the boys started a band back home called, simply, Ralph Lewis Family and Friends, and, according to Ralph, they "have been in some fashion of a band ever since." For many years, they played in a straight bluegrass outfit called the Piney Mountain Boys. Then, about seven years ago, they formed their present incarnation: the Sons of Ralph, Featuring Ralph.

By all accounts, the Sons of Ralph evolved gradually and informally from a series of bands and home picking sessions. Marty and Don, in various groups of their own over the years, had strayed from the straight bluegrass with which they had grown up. In the early 1990s, they formed a group called the Lids, which featured future Sons of Ralph drummer Richard Foulk and tended more toward psychedelic and rock-based music. "My dad," explains Don, "would come and sit in with us every once in a while. And he'd steal the show." Ralph's musical flexibility and



The Sons of Ralph, Featuring Ralph, (left to right) Gary Wiley, Ralph Lewis, Richard Foulk, Marty Lewis, Don Lewis. Illustration from *Live...Tune to This* CD, Root Records, 2003.

his ability to play along with any style were crucial to the development of the band. “He’s so open-minded,” remarks Don. “[That’s] the main thing. . . . that’s what really drives us, to this day. We can do about anything, and he’s open to it.”

Ralph recalls that the Sons of Ralph’s style developed largely in response to requests from their audience. The Lewises had begun playing as the Piney Mountain Boys at Jack of the Wood, an Asheville bar which today serves as the Sons’ headquarters and regular gig. “When we started playing there about five years ago,” Ralph said in 2000, “we were playing traditional bluegrass, but people kind of got to request that we [do] different things, you know, like some folk, old country, and a little rock and roll or whatever. So everybody was so proficient at different kinds of music that we started just doing that, and when we did that, our crowd just automatically got about three times as big.” Thus, The Sons

of Ralph sound flowered from a number of elements, which had been years in the making. The home jam session—whose spirit prevails today in the Sons of Ralph’s performances, despite the jam’s relocation to the stage—provided a space where family members and friends could swap styles and ideas, creating an open-ended musical dialogue. Such sessions had been part of the Lewis’ experience since Ralph’s childhood, when family and friends would get together to play music on porches and in living rooms. The same atmosphere predominated when Marty and Don picked up electric instruments and newer traditions. Importantly, the jam-session dialogue between musicians expanded quickly to incorporate the additional demands of a growing public audience, and the resulting music reflected the twists and tangents of a conversation that is still very much in progress. “It’s an ongoing experiment,” says Don. The band patriarch’s willingness to embrace contemporary music helps fuel the experiment. Of equal importance, though, is the unwavering dedication of father and sons to their musical roots.

*Bill Monroe, Elvis, and Ralph: The Bluegrass/
Rock and Roll Continuum*

If the Sons of Ralph bring bluegrass and rock and roll closer together than those genres typically venture, their doing so may not be as much of a stretch (or sacrilege) as a first glance might suggest. Indeed, bluegrass and rock and roll share certain aesthetic and ideological commonalities, and as musicians from Bill Monroe to Elvis to the New Grass Revival have demonstrated, the boundaries between these seemingly opposite strains of music have never been unalterably fixed. Bluegrass, according to Don, was really the rock and roll acoustic music of its day. And Ralph recalls: “Back in the late forties and mid forties, on up into the early fifties, I was playing rock and roll and didn’t know it . . . We were kind of manufacturing stuff as we went. We’d take some old song and change the beat and start to boogie, you know, and get the crowd just in a frenzy.”⁵

The relationship between Bill Monroe and Elvis Presley illustrates the often-overlooked complexity of the bluegrass/rock and roll story. When Elvis backed his first single with a jumped-up cover of Monroe’s “Blue Moon of Kentucky,” shifting Monroe’s waltzing tune into an upbeat 4/4 time, Monroe reacted positively. As Monroe revealed in an interview with Neil Rosenberg, Elvis performed at the *Grand Ole Opry* soon after the release of his 4/4 version of the song: “He come around, apologized for the way that he’d changed ‘Blue Moon of Kentucky’ and

I told him that if it would help him get his start and give him a different style, I was for him a hundred percent.” In August of 1954, immediately on the heels of Elvis’ cover, Bill Monroe re-recorded “Blue Moon of Kentucky.” The new version registered the influence of Elvis’ rock and roll rendition, and moved the once lilting tune into an up-tempo time.⁶ One week prior to his own re-recording of his old tune, Monroe encouraged the Stanley Brothers to cover the song, complete again with Elvis’ 4/4 arrangement. Until his death, Monroe would continue to play the song with the new rhythm.

Just as their recordings borrowed from each other’s arrangements, Elvis and Bill Monroe shared with each other a mutual respect and what would seem to be an unlikely friendship. “Bill said that Elvis would call him up real late at night wanting to talk,” Ralph Lewis recalls, “like, three, four, five o’clock in the morning. And couldn’t sleep, and wanted to ask him this, that, and the other. And Bill always called him the Punk. Said, ‘What’re you doing, Punk?’” Ralph also recalled the following:

[We] were playing like a kind of a farmers’ market deal, like a fairgrounds, in Memphis. It was a brand new thing down by the river, back at that time. And so we were pulling out of there, heading for the West Coast, you know, and I was driving the bus when we pulled out. I wasn’t even thinking about Elvis or anything, we were just on one of those thoroughfares to get to the interstate. Well, I looked over there to the right, and there was Graceland gate. And I said, “Hey, Bill, here’s where Elvis lives.” He said, “Really?” And I said, “Yeah.” I said, “You want to pull in?”—I was just kind of joking, you know. He said, “Yeah, pull in.”

So we wheeled in there, and the guard got out of a little shack there and came over, and he said, “Man, Elvis is going to have a tizzy.” He said, “Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys here, and he’s not here.” He said, “[Elvis] flew out this morning for Los Angeles, for Hollywood.” And [the guard] told us to come in, that the place would be ours. “There’s cooks up there, anything you want to eat, anything you want to do,” he said. “The place is yours, as long as you want to stay.” So Bill told him, “No we’ve got to head on for the West Coast”—but see, we would have had a jam session! No telling how long it would have lasted.

But Elvis did come a lot of times, would get a disguise, and come to [Monroe’s] shows and watch him. And he didn’t want Bill to say nothing about him, [or] create a commotion. But Bill

said that a few times [Elvis] had come in and watched the show. And [he'd] have three or four people with him, and have whiskers and everything, and a false face or something, you know, [so] that people wouldn't recognize him.

The private jam session between Bill Monroe's Bluegrass Boys and Elvis never happened, but the possibility that it could have happened testifies to the kind of cross-fertilization that did, in fact, take place between genres, despite the vocal anti-Elvis protests of some of bluegrass' leading figures. While the spirit of that imagined Graceland pickin' session is evident in the on-stage and on-record jams enacted today by the Lewises, Foulk, and Wiley, the Sons of Ralph also incorporate in their music even more far-flung voices from the Beatles to Metallica. Given the historical flirtations of bluegrass and rock and roll, these incorporations are perhaps not so blasphemous as they may at first appear. The Sons of Ralph are also building upon the work of such experimental groups as the New Grass Revival, who in the late 1970s began mixing styles more aggressively and with increasing amplification. Both Marty and Don cite family friend Curtis Burch, of the original New Grass Revival, as one of their influences, and the local press has sometimes billed the Sons of Ralph sound with the now-generic label, "newgrass."⁷

In Ralph's early years, labels were less intrusive than they are in today's music. Bill Monroe had been playing his own style of country or hillbilly music for a decade before the name of his band, the Bluegrass Boys, came to stand for an entire style. Ralph's years in Detroit as half of the Lewis Brothers reflected a general trend among some country musicians during the 1940s toward a pre-rock and roll "boogie" style. One of Ralph's favorite groups, the Delmore Brothers, pioneered the "hillbilly boogie" sound, adding a backing combo, a bluesy harmonica, and even a thumping electric guitar into the old-timey, brother-harmony style they had developed in the 1930s. Today, the Sons of Ralph fit neatly within that tradition, reminding us that all traditions are fluid and that the labels themselves—mountain music, bluegrass, hillbilly, boogie, rock and roll, whatever—are ultimately irrelevant.

Grab a Root: The Sons of Ralph and the Mountain Music Tradition

Despite their well-deserved reputation for wild genre-bending and loud music, the Sons of Ralph consistently remain close to their traditional roots, carefully centering their sound and style on the mountain

music and bluegrass foundations of their family, their childhoods, and their region. Their obvious respect for and adherence to traditional local styles—and the fact that Ralph, Marty, and Don can and do still play it “straight” much of the time—has allowed them to keep both their younger, more rock-oriented audiences and the approval of most old-timers, neighbors, and tradition-minded fellow musicians. The Lewis’ latest CD, recorded in 2003 without Foulk and Wiley, proves beyond question that Ralph and the boys are indeed masters of what Don calls “straight, acoustic mountain music.” Entitled *Mountain Boys*, the album spotlights their abilities to write as well as play songs in classic bluegrass style: twelve of *Mountain Boys*’ fourteen songs are originals, most of them penned by Marty (the CD also features a cover of the Delmore Brothers’ “Southern Moon” and an arrangement of the traditional “Liza Jane”). “Madison County” is a tribute to the Lewis’ home place; “Mountain Boy” and “Tater Patch” are as good as anything happening in bluegrass today. “Jonie Lee,” meanwhile, is a haunting Cajun-styled tune, and “Drifting with the Flow” has a slow, acoustic “jam band” feel. On the new album, all fit together seamlessly into a smooth bluegrass production.

Even the more progressive elements of the Sons of Ralph sound never leave earshot of the group’s traditional base. That fact, along with the contagious fun of a Sons of Ralph performance, helps win over everyone except those Marty and Don describe as a few “sticks in the mud.”

A typical Sons of Ralph performance embodies numerous aspects of traditional mountain music as inherited and personalized by the Lewis family. The band’s repertoire includes, alongside a heavy dose of original material, a number of bluegrass standards, reinvented to fit the Sons’ style. Many of these selections, by their authorship or by association, offer links to the musical communities the Lewises, and Ralph in particular, have known firsthand through the years. Ralph, on upright bass, originally recorded “Salty Dog” with its authors, Wiley and Zeke Morris, for a Rounder Records album in the 1970s. The sound resurfaces in the Sons’ repertoire as a slow, electric groove. One of the Sons’ signature tunes, the opening track of their *Grab a Root and Growl*, is “Doin’ My Time,” a Flatt and Scruggs classic written by Jimmie Skinner, an old friend of Ralph. Another of Ralph’s friends, Pete Goble, wrote “Big Spike Hammer,” a song first recorded by the Osborne Brothers and refigured (with a reggae rhythm) into what could be considered the Sons’ theme song. All of these songs, along with Jimmy Martin’s “Skip, Hop, and Wobble” and the traditional “Ridin’ on that New River Train” appear on *Grab a Root and Growl* and are regular features, often by audi-

ence request, of the group's live shows. Although the covers emerge transformed dramatically,⁸ they nonetheless connect the group to a rich web of personal experiences and relationships, founded on a sturdy background in traditional music and bluegrass.

Though the standard bluegrass instrumentation has expanded in the Sons of Ralph lineup to include electric bass, drums, and often electric guitars, the core of the instrumentation remains rooted in the mainstream of traditional bluegrass, with most tunes relying on mandolin, fiddle, and guitar for their basic structure. Banjo and dobro are also switched occasionally into the mix. Equally significant, the style of playing remains true to its foundations. The Sons' music, stretching always in several directions at once, revolves largely around the licks and rhythms of Ralph's mandolin (or, since there is usually a fair amount of instrument-swapping, Ralph's fiddle or guitar). The band's physical arrangement onstage underscores this structure, with Ralph standing center stage, a son on either side, and Wiley and Foulk on the edges of



Illustration from *Mountain Boys* CD, Root Records, 2003.

the group. As Marty and Don note, their father's playing and singing, removed from the surrounding rock and roll, would fit as seamlessly into a Bluegrass Boys as a Sons of Ralph performance.

DON: Like if you listen to "Salty Dog," our dad doesn't do anything different in "Salty Dog" than he's ever done. It's just rock and roll and drums behind it. You know, he does the same breaks, and he does the same rhythm, and he sings the same. It's like, "Wow. Let's make a reggae song out of that!"

MARTY: What would happen if we did a little Bo Diddley beat to this? (Laughs)

DON: What would happen if a little Bo Diddley happened in the middle of "Rollin' in My Sweet Baby's Arms?" What would happen if we took "New River Train" and made it heavy metal—yeah! (Laughs) And that's what we do to this day.

The performance of "fiddlesticks" by Don and drummer Richard Foulk at the start of *Grab a Root and Growl* and at some point during most Sons of Ralph shows especially illustrates the band's dual sense of connection to—and departure from—tradition. In the traditional style of fiddlesticks, the fiddler bows the upper two strings of the instrument while a partner strikes the lower two, open-tuned strings with long, thin sticks, creating a droning percussion over the bowed melody. In Don and Foulk's adaptation of the tradition, Don doesn't bow the fiddle at all, but, holding the instrument with both hands, simply fingers the notes, which are sounded only by Foulk's percussion. Rather than beat only two open-tuned strings, meanwhile, Foulk plays on all four. "And with him doing it," Don explains, "I can turn the fiddle, and I can do whatever. I can make him play one through four, all the strings . . . or just mute it and have it be a percussion." Without the bowing or droning usually characteristic of fiddlesticks—and with Don controlling, by moving the instrument, which strings Foulk hits—the performance creates a sound unique to the Sons of Ralph. Also unique, of course, is the electrification of the fiddle.

The novelty of fiddlesticks, the peculiar sound of their performance, and the rapid physical motion of the sticks themselves in the player's hands, make the practice something of a spectacle: fiddlesticks are as much fun to watch as they are to hear. Don recalls seeing people play fiddlesticks off and on throughout his life, most often at some pub-

lic exhibition such as a festival, and he carries their traditional showmanship into his own performance. Don noted:

The Mountain Folk Festival, and Bascom Lamar's festival, both of those, I'd see somebody do it, every once in a while. It's not something that you would see all the time. But when you did, it was real showy, and to say the least, the way we do it freaks people out, because I have an electric fiddle, and I do effects . . . We can do it, and I can put effects on, like a distortion pedal, or a Whammy pedal, or some of our craziness. And kind of take it to outer space, I guess.⁹

Aesthetic Continuities: Unraveling the Elements of a "Lewis Style"

More than a common instrumentation and repertoire—and more than connections to old ways through such updated techniques as electric fiddlesticks—links the Sons of Ralph's playing today with Ralph's personal musical traditions and experience. An observer of and musician in various groups through the years, Ralph has inherited, developed, and articulated certain performance traits valued as key to successful musicianship. While the precise musical expressions, and even genres, may have altered along the road from the Lewis Brothers to the Bluegrass Boys to the Sons of Ralph, all of Ralph's music is informed by a common base of stylistic ideals and philosophical values. These constants, developed largely from values familiar to all mountain and bluegrass musicians, contribute to what can be called the "Lewis Style," and form the backbone of the Sons of Ralph's performance.

A key to this style is versatility, both instrumental and stylistic. As Ralph notes, the 1930s and 1940s saw a number of brother acts gain regional and national attention and each group developed its own, immediately recognizable sound. What most distinguished the original Lewis Brothers from groups like the Delmore, Monroe, and Morris Brothers, Ralph remembers, was their unusual instrumental versatility. Ralph noted that his older brother, Ervin, was a champion fiddler, who could also play mandolin, guitar, and banjo. Ralph himself plays not only mandolin and guitar, but is also a capable fiddler and bassist. He even plays lead electric guitar on "111," one of the Sons' most intense instrumental jams. This versatility has passed on to his sons as well: in the course of an evening's performance, Marty plays guitar and dobro, while Don moves between fiddle, mandolin, banjo, and guitar. The breadth of this instrumental arsenal allows the five-man band to experiment with multiple combinations of instruments, recalling the earlier Lewis

Brothers performances. This instrumental versatility matches the group's stylistic versatility. Ralph often expresses these qualities as "proficiency" with multiple instruments or style. Recalling the genesis of the Sons, Ralph notes that "everybody was so proficient at different kinds of music," that the group was able to adopt a wide range of sounds into their repertoire. This multi-proficiency, Ralph claims, is at the heart of the Sons' popularity.

Other, related qualities of the Lewis Style are innovation and freshness. Ralph notes that a listener might not recognize the same song played twice within a one or two-week period. "Our belief is that if you do the same numbers the same way over and over, you're going to get stale, and your listening public is going to get stale with you." Ralph's operating principle is that you have to "keep everything fresh." In a similar fashion, Bill Monroe encouraged innovation within tradition among his instrumentalists, allowing them space—within the pre-set structure of a bluegrass break—in which they could express their own personal style. Bluegrass' emphasis on creative, virtuoso solos, often likened to the qualities of a jazz ensemble, also prefigures and parallels the central role of the guitar solo in modern rock and roll. The spirits of the bluegrass solo and the rock solo convene in the lightning-speed instrumental breaks performed by both Marty and Don.¹⁰

The "freshness" of the music stems from the intentional spontaneity of its performance, reflected in the attitudes of both Bill Monroe and Ralph Lewis toward practice. When Ralph joined the Bluegrass Boys, he remembers, the new group played together "almost all afternoon and almost all night" at their first meeting. "From then on," he declared, "we never did practice again."

I asked him [Monroe], like when we was going to do a ABC-TV show, fiftieth anniversary of the *Grand Ole Opry*. I said, "You want to get in a room and run over what we're going to do?" He said, "No, a Bluegrass Boy don't need that." (Laughs) So, we just always stepped out and did it. And he says that's the way that you get the freshness of everything. Said if you practice something over and over, you're going to get tired of it before the public hears it—which is pretty much true.

Ralph's description of the Sons of Ralph's formation is almost identical to his recollection of his experience with the Bluegrass Boys:

A lot of people when I tell them this will look at me sideways or whatever, but . . . we worked, like, three or four nights before

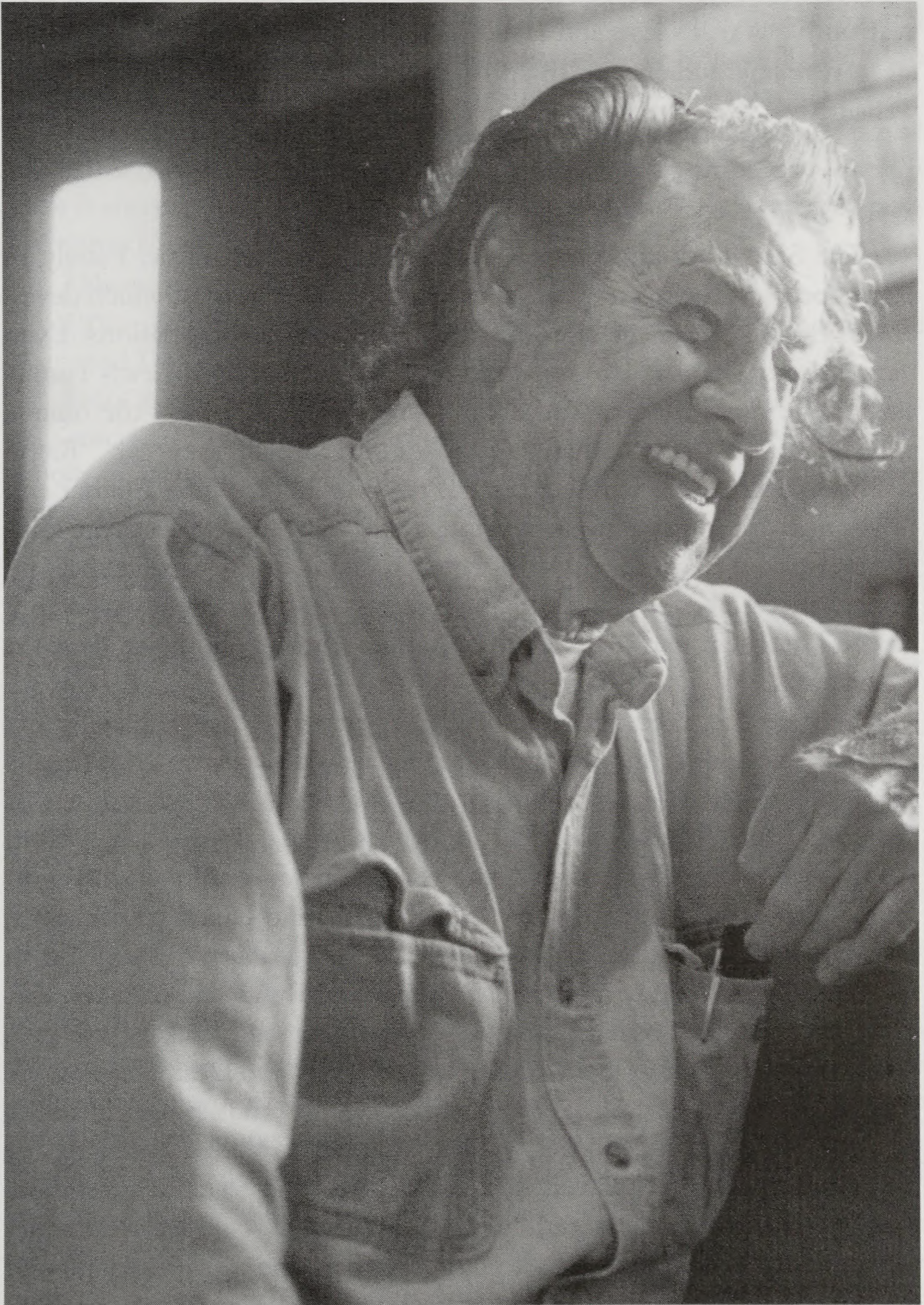
we got [the Sons] together We had an idea of certain things that we wanted to do, plus the standards, you know. So we went ahead and worked out a few numbers that we changed completely and made them ours But as far as having a practice session, we haven't had one in four years!

The purposeful lack of rehearsal and—as is generally a given among bluegrass groups—the lack of sheet music allow for the spontaneity and freedom crucial to a good performance. When Ralph and his brother Ervin played for clubs in Niagara Falls, Canada, and Detroit, their Northern audiences, who had never before heard Southern mountain music, “just couldn't understand how you could get up there and entertain like that, and not have sheet music in front of [you].” Ralph tells the story of a Northern journalist who asked Homer and Jethro, the country-comedy duet, if they could read sheet music: “No,” Jethro replied, “not enough to hurt my pickin'!” The musician's punch line suggests the contrast in priorities between different types of music and of different audiences. Improvisation, a skill honed in the circles of countless living room pickin' parties, is at the heart of traditional mountain music. Its value is reflected in the rejection of formal, restrictive structures, and it remains overwhelmingly evident in the music of the Sons of Ralph.

Although the Sons have amply demonstrated their ability to translate the energy of their live shows into the format of a studio album, the group is still very much a “live” band. The live context presents most fully the band in its natural element and provides an ideal space for such qualities as improvisation and innovation. Although the band recorded their first album, *Grab a Root and Growl*, in the studio, they were careful to recreate on the album the performance qualities of a live stage show. “The best part,” Don explained in an interview published in Asheville's *Mountain Xpress* in 2001, “was that we actually started out to do a live CD, but then decided to go ahead and do it in the studio, and . . . we're really happy that so many first takes ended up on the CD A lot of the songs on the CD are literally first takes. So it seems live. That's the way we play those songs on stage.” Fittingly, their second CD, *Live . . . Tune To This* (2003), was recorded at the Sons' primary stomping grounds, Jack of the Wood, in front of a live audience. “It was actually one set,” Marty said of the recording, and Don added: “We just did it one night, and no overdubs. One take per song. Didn't know which songs were going to be on it.”

A final constant in the Lewis Style is emotional rather than musical, and is particularly evident in this live context: “Let's have fun,” Ralph

remembers telling his fellow Bluegrass Boys, “or let’s don’t pick.” “Fun’s fun,” Don says, summing up the appeal of the band to their diverse and appreciative audiences. The members of the band clearly have a good time on stage, joking and laughing with each other and the audience between songs and performing with relentless energy, often until two or three in the morning. The audience takes part in the fun as well: accord-



Ralph Lewis. Photo by Colleen Cook, 2002.

ing to Don, an average Sons of Ralph night will start with the older, “fifty-something crowd.” When they leave sometime after the second set, the younger people will get in and “by the end of the night, it’s all of the younger kids drinking and having fun, and we kick it up a notch and play our party stuff.” The infectious, good-humored energy of the group makes them a popular band for weddings, currently one of their most frequent types of gig, and the Sons play at Jack of the Wood each year on New Year’s Eve and Halloween (in costume) to large, appropriately reveling audiences. “Ralph’s motto,” according to the band’s website, is: “It’s a party every time!”

Conclusion

The Sons of Ralph’s music is, above all, a family music. Family, in fact, is perhaps the most crucial element in the Lewis Style, which developed primarily from the close musical ties across blood relations. Even the names of Ralph’s bands—the Lewis Brothers, Ralph Lewis Family and Friends, and the Sons of Ralph—emphasize purposely the unique connection of the musicians. “One of the draws, they say,” Ralph laughs, explaining his band’s appeal to the public, “is seeing a father and two sons that can get along long enough to do a show.” Indeed, the family atmosphere pervades the performance. Sometimes Marty and Don’s sister, Sherry, takes the stage to sing a couple of numbers alongside her dad and brothers, and there are often family members in the audience at local shows.

The electric, schizophrenic breed of bluegrass performed by the Sons of Ralph, then, may be appropriately viewed as part of a legitimate, vibrant family tradition, grounded in the larger musical communities of place and genre. The Lewis family tradition is inseparable ultimately from the musical heritage—the ballad singing and fiddle techniques, the community pickings, and the old-time string-band repertoires, instrumentations, and styles—of Madison County and Western North Carolina. The lived experiences of Ralph and the boys also connect their music to another, looser community of cross-regional pickers, the professional bluegrass musicians among whom Marty and Don, often on the road as children, grew up and first learned to play music: Kenny Baker, Chubby Wise, Jimmy Martin, James Monroe, Grandpa Jones, Ricky Skaggs, Marty Stuart, Curtis Burch, and Bill Monroe, to name only a few. Finally, there is the still larger, “virtual” community—no less real a factor in the development of a tradition than the other groups—of far-flung musicians from Bo Diddley to Blood, Sweat, and Tears, brought home on records, over the radio waves, and even through television.

Within the rock and roll bluegrass of Ralph, Marty, and Don Lewis, Richard Foulk and Gary Wiley, it is all part of the same musical picture.

Endnotes

¹ Biographical information and all subsequent quotations of Ralph Lewis are from an interview by the author, Asheville, NC, October 13, 2002. Lewis' autobiographical sketch in *Madison County Heritage* provides some additional biographical background. For more information on the Sons of Ralph, or to purchase a CD, see the band's website at <http://www.sonsofralph.com>.

² The instrumental lineup described here is only a general outline, since all of the band members are proficient on more than one instrument; although there is always plenty of variation in this lineup, the list above notes each players' primary instrument.

³ Sharpe, p. xxv.

⁴ This and subsequent quotations are from an interview by the author with Marty and Don Lewis, Dec. 4, 2002, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁵ Neil Rosenberg, in his article "Bluegrass, Rock and Roll, and 'Blue Moon of Kentucky,'" has shown convincingly that the historical and continuing interactions of bluegrass and rock and roll are much more complex than is often assumed. Summoning up the almost mythic narrative of the two genres' opposition—the exile of one sound with the rise of another—Rosenberg summarizes the usual argument: "All accounts of the early history of bluegrass music," he writes, "allude to the way in which rock and roll threatened bluegrass during the middle and late fifties" (66).

⁶ Rosenberg, pp. 74-75.

⁷ A headline in the *Mountain Xpress*, Asheville's independent weekly newspaper, declared "Local 'newgrass' boys release debut CD," when the band released *Grab a Root and Growl* in 2001 (Barber, "Grabbin' and growlin").

⁸ One frantic minute-and-a-half medley, for example, joins the fiddle standard "Orange Blossom Special" with Jimi Hendrix's psychedelic monster, "Third Stone from the Sun."

⁹ The Sons of Ralph CD *Grab a Root and Growl* (2001) opens with a brief sample of Don and Foulk's electric fiddlesticks. For a performance of fiddlesticks in the older style, see Burl and Maggie Hammons' "Jimmy Johnson" on *The Hammons Family*. Don notes that Chapel Hill's Red Clay Ramblers, another contemporary group that famously blends diverse traditions with old-time music, also includes performances of fiddlesticks in its repertoire.

¹⁰ For a useful discussion of improvisation within jazz and bluegrass solo performance, see Cantwell, *Bluegrass Breakdown*, 157-175.

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2004 Brown-Hudson Awards

Citations for the Brown-Hudson Awards, the Community Traditions Award, and the Certificate of Recognition for Excellence in Preserving Cultural Heritage (pp. 64-66) were read at the North Carolina Folklore Society Annual Conference, "The Ebb and Flow of Community Culture: Impacts of Change on Coastal Communities." The meeting took place on March 22, 2004, at the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum, Harkers Island, North Carolina.

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Earl and Maxwell Carawan: Musicians

~ by Amy Davis

I first heard Earl and Maxwell Carawan play at the North Carolina Folklore Society annual meeting in Columbia, North Carolina, in 1999. The meeting was held in conjunction with a street festival in Columbia's historic downtown. Earl and Max were set up in front of the old cinema, and their music attracted myself and many others like moths to a flame. Their guitar work was excellent and their singing harmonies matched with that beautiful closeness only siblings enjoy. I listened for awhile that day, but the crowd became thick, so I wandered off to the rest of the festival. It was a good two hours later, after lunch, that I returned, only to find the brothers still going strong. "Good Lord," I thought, "These guys just don't quit."

The Carawans' joy for singing and playing and, yes, their stamina, was evident when I had a chance to visit them a little over a year ago. I sat at Earl's kitchen table for many delightful hours, listening to old country songs and tales about growing up in Hyde County. As a duo, Earl and Max's music was not an equal sum of its parts: one plus one did not equal two musicians in this case, but something much greater. Their years of playing together fostered an amazingly close connection: one brother only needed to play a note or two of a song at the start, and the other would fall right into place.

Earl and Max Carawan are third generation musicians from rural Hyde County. Their grandfather, Rufus Carawan, encouraged all of his children—including Earl and Max's father, Maxwell—to play fiddle, banjo, and guitar for square dances and local gatherings. Earl and Max spent many of their formative years with Grandfather Rufus, a subsistence farmer, fisherman, trapper, and hunter, who often served as a guide for other hunters in the county. Music making was always a large part of the many gatherings and dances their grandfather held at their house.

As a teenager, Max and his older brother, John, played guitars and sang on radio station WRRF in Washington, North Carolina, with their father, who also drove a delivery truck, called a “rolling store,” for a general store in the area. This provided folks in isolated areas a way to trade produce, eggs, and even live chickens for commodities. It also was a great way for the Carawans to get musical engagements at little communities all over the county.

In 1949, Max and his brother, John Carawan, joined the Wesley Parker Tent Show. As musicians and stage hands, they performed country and western songs, comedy, and blackface routines. In 1952, Max, John, and



The Carawan Brothers, (left to right) Leland, Max (1934-2004), and Earl. A resident of Missouri, Leland occasionally came home to North Carolina to perform with Max and Earl. *Photo by Sandy Carawan, 2003.*

their brother, Leland, organized the Carawan Brothers Tent Show, and traveled for several seasons throughout rural Eastern North Carolina.

Earl Carawan played for square dances and other community events in the region for many years. He worked as maintenance supervisor for the Hyde County schools for twenty-two years before retiring in 1993. Earl stopped playing music several times, but always came back around to it. (And today, judging by the way his living room has been transformed into a home recording studio, it looks like he'll be playing for quite awhile.)

When folklorist Bill Mansfield met the Carawan brothers in 1997, they had just gotten back into playing with their older brother, John. John passed away later that year, but Earl and Max continued to work up a number of the old songs they remembered—old time, bluegrass, early country, and popular songs from the 1940s. The brothers began playing for events sponsored by Pocosin Arts in Columbia, including the annual Scuppernong River Fest. They have also performed each year at the Ocracoke Festival on Ocracoke Island since its inception.

It grieves me now greatly to deliver the news that Maxwell Carawan passed away on March 15, after an eight-month battle with cancer, just a few days before the award letter arrived. Earl Carawan has come to accept the Brown-Hudson award today on behalf of both brothers. We send heartfelt condolences to the Carawan family for their loss of such a wonderful man. We also hope they will accept our congratulations to Earl and Maxwell Carawan, two talented and generous musicians, who have continued a musical legacy in their corner of the world. It is with great pleasure that I present Earl and Maxwell Carawan with the North Carolina Folklore Society's Brown-Hudson award for traditional artists.

Connie Mason: Folklorist and Folksinger

~ by JoAnne Powell and Karen Willis Amspacher

The Brown-Hudson Award nomination for Connie Mason was submitted jointly by the North Carolina Maritime Museum and the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum to recognize Connie for her contributions to the appreciation, continuation, and study of folk traditions in coastal North Carolina.

The North Carolina Maritime Museum has been fortunate to have Connie on its staff for over fifteen years. As a curator of history, she has been responsible for producing truly outstanding folklife programs like *Traditional Trades and Pastimes* (1988), the first of three annual programs, featuring demonstrations of the arts of boatbuilding, boat-modeling,



Connie Mason. Photo by Carmine Prioli, 2004.

decoy carving, clam-rake, crabpot, and potato house construction, netmaking, and nautical ropework. Another program was *Coastal Folkways Day* (1989). Offered in conjunction with the North Carolina Folklore Society's annual meeting, this event featured netmaking, decoy carving, model boat making, blues music by Big Boy Henry, and work songs by the Menhaden

Chanteymen. A roster of titles of some of Connie's other programs would include: *Fishermen's Memorial Services* (Beaufort 2001 and Southport 2002); *North Carolina Music Day* (2002, 2003, and 2004); *Wind, Water, and Song: the Story of Portsmouth Island* (1990); and *Lighthouses of North Carolina* (1996).

Connie has also been the museum's collections manager, responsible for caring for the precious artifacts, historic photographs, rare books, and traditional watercraft that the museum uses to interpret the state's coastal folklife. Exhibits that she has assembled include (but are not limited to): *Soldiers of Surf and Storm*, an exhibit and related programming

that highlights the history and activities of the North Carolina lifesaving service; *Commercial Fishing: America's First Industry*, an exhibit featuring historic fisheries of North Carolina from whaling and oystering to mulleting and crabbing; and *Waterfowling in North Carolina*, an exhibit highlighting the history of waterfowling, hunt clubs, and decoy carving along the entire North Carolina coast.

In addition to all of Connie's work described here, she also designed and constructed special event exhibits for the Core Sound Decoy Festival and later the Core Sound Waterfowl Weekend celebrations. These exhibits included items that helped people of all ages learn more about the state's waterfowl heritage. Finally, Connie created an award-winning exhibit of antique decoys from the maritime museum's collection that was set up for the Core Sound Decoy Festival artifact exhibition.

For her generous and imaginative efforts in collecting, interpreting, and exhibiting Down East folklife for the people of North Carolina, the North Carolina Maritime Museum is proud to nominate our friend and colleague, Connie Mason, for a Brown-Hudson Award.

JoAnne Powell

~ ~ ~

As JoAnne Powell of the North Carolina Maritime Museum has acknowledged, Connie has many professional accomplishments, awards, projects completed, projects underway, and projects in the works. Her efforts as a folklorist, historian, musician, songwriter, collections specialist, curator, and artist are so numerous that it is difficult to find someone with a comparable measure of talent and achievements. Yet all of this does not tell of the Connie Mason who has reached out to small groups and unknown places to lead efforts in recording, documenting, preserving, and celebrating in story and song many of the previously unknown elements of North Carolina's coastal heritage.

Did you know, for example, that some of Connie's first and most historically significant fieldwork was with the National Park Service's Oral History Program? Because of her knowledge, understanding, and commitment to Portsmouth Village's people, her voice recordings of Marian Babb, Lionel Gilgo, and others who had lived there are now one of the key resources for research on Core Banks and the communities that once dotted our coastal islands. Like most of Connie's work, her vision did not stop with recording the spoken word: it grew to include the living community and fieldwork that later built a foundation of history that helped

establish the Friends of Portsmouth Island. This organization has played a vital role in the preservation of that community's historic places and has established the homecoming celebrations that continue to grow and bring others to support the care of this sacred place.

Did you know, as well, that Connie Mason was working with the "Menhaden Chanteymen" long before anyone beyond the town limits of Beaufort knew they were there? The trust she built helped lay the groundwork for this group's future accomplishments. Still, none of what was to follow for the Chanteymen—an appearance at Carnegie Hall, a North Carolina Folk Heritage Award, and some well-deserved national recognition—would have been possible without those early relationships that Connie forged.

Did you know it was a call from the North Carolina Seafood Festival's board of directors to Connie Mason that began what is now "Coastal Yesterday, Coastal Today" and the entire educational program at the North Carolina Seafood Festival? Today, the 100,000+ people who attend this event have the opportunity to visit with a net-hanger, a decoy carver, a commercial fisherman, and to learn more about the Friends of Portsmouth Island and other local organizations. Through environmental education opportunities offered by "Coastal Today," these thousands of visitors learn that our coastal traditions are directly affected by the natural resources we must all work to protect.

Did you know that from the Seafood Festival's educational program has come the commercial fisherman's day of honor, "The Blessing of the Fleet"? This event annually provides an occasion to honor those who have come before, to offer thanks for the abundance the sea provides, and to pray for the safety of those who work the often perilous waters of our coast. It also provides the opportunity to recognize the valuable contributions of this industry to the state's history and economy, and this event—like so many that have flowered from Connie's work—reaches far beyond the public message to the hearts of those whose stories she is helping to tell. The faces of the fishermen and their families who ride with them on the bows and bulwarks of those trawlers and shrimp boats tell of their pride in who they are and what they do. Does this not reveal the truest and deepest meaning of our collective work? To honor the lives and, in doing so, touch the hearts of those who have lived the experiences that we record, document, and labor to preserve? That is what Connie Mason understands and strives for in all that she does.

Did you know that Connie Mason helped build the "place" where we gather today? As a descendant of the Mason family of Stacy, her

“Daddy’s hometown,” Connie is part of this story. Her role in guiding and directing the museum has often gone unseen, but she has been vital to most of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum’s greatest accomplishments and resources. For the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum, Connie is a constant advisor, mentor, and deeply valued partner. This summer, it will be Connie Mason who will help lead our delegation to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, and who will ensure that the stories of the people of Core Sound and Down East will be told with honor, respect, and integrity to the thousands who will hear her voice.

Connie Mason’s lifetime of work has been far-reaching and visionary, her accomplishments many, and her leadership critical to the cultural preservation of our coastal region. It is for the work that Connie has led and inspired on the home front for which the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum is honored to join with the North Carolina Maritime Museum in nominating her for a Brown-Hudson Award. This work, like Connie herself, has often reached behind the scenes and through others in ways that have made us more effective leaders and better partners in our shared commitment to this area’s heritage, history, and future.

Today, with this nomination, we say “Thank you, Connie!” for what you have given to all of the people of North Carolina, and especially for what you have given to the people of *your* hometown.

Karen Willis Amspacher

2004 Community Traditions Award

The Mailboat: Karen Willis Amspacher, Editor

~ by Connie Mason

Down East mailboats—those round-stern Core Sounders with names like *Ida*, *Meteor*, *Pet*, and *Viola*—were a welcome sight to islanders, Bankers, and all coastal dwellers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They brought freight, produce, mail, news, and visiting friends upon their juniper decks. They were a link between coastal communities, villages, hammocks, settlements, cities and a world otherwise unaffected by tides and nor'easters. Their service was much anticipated, appreciated, and vital.

The Mailboat, published by Karen Willis Amspacher, is true to its namesake's mission and importance. With ten regular editions, four yearbook edi-

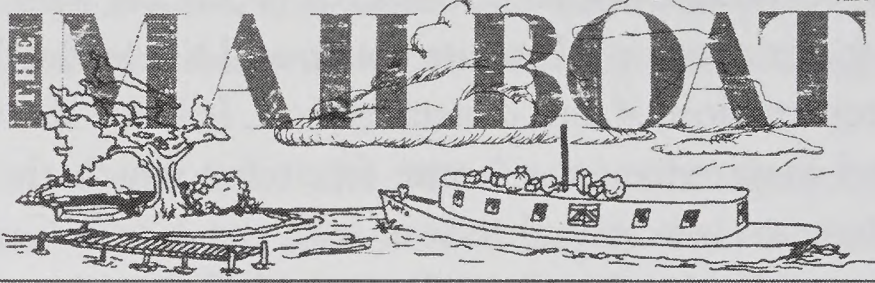
tions, and numerous special Christmas books, Karen has created priceless course books for coastal folklife, history, and traditions.

The contributors to *The Mailboat* are local writers, poets, and historians, most of whom did not have a forum or venue before *The Mailboat* pulled away from its Harkers Island dock in 1990. Besides awakening old memories in local residents, *The Mailboat* has educated and informed scholars and tourists, promoting understanding, acceptance, and appreciation for a coastal landscape and culture in historical, economical, and ecological transition.


Karen's talents have been spread among many other projects and works over the years, such as the Harkers Island United Methodist

\$2.50

THE MAILBOAT



FALL 1991, Vol. 2, No. 3 ©The Mailboat, P.O. Box 3, Harkers Island, NC 28531



Bogue Banks fishing crew 1950s (Photo by Jerry Schumacher)

Fall Fishing

What's Inside

Cover	Fall Fishing	14	Hospital/Medicines	23	D... Buffaloes
2	Bow Line	15	Miss Ollie & Dr. Moore	25	Lukens Post Office
3	Bogue Banks Crews	17	John's Creek Diary	26	Hurricane Memories
5	Beach Seine Fishery	18	Atlantic Memories	27	Book Review
7	Harkers Island Fishermen	19	Schools and Teachers	29	Christmas Notes
8	Fun-Fishin'	20	The Big Man and the Mule	31	Hill's View
11	Lion Tamer's Club	21	Cape Lookout Journal	32	Partners

Women's cookbook and folkways guide, *Island Born and Bred*. First published in 1987, the cookbook is now in its tenth printing, and has sold more than 25,000 copies. For more than ten years, she produced the program booklets—themselves individual gems of local history—for the Core Sound Decoy Festival, and she continues to produce booklets for the annual Waterfowl Weekend celebrations.

Karen's work ethic is legendary. As executive director of the non-profit Core Sound Waterfowl Museum, she has dedicated her heart and soul to her community culture. Moreover, Karen's zeal is infectious. She has inspired works of art, poetry, photography, and music; all to enhance, honor, and preserve the community she loves. Many times she has complained, "There's just not enough time or money to do what needs to be done." But she has persevered, and in spite of economic downturns, hurricanes, and challenges of every kind, Karen has stayed the course for the sake of the heritage and the people she loves so deeply.

Karen's other commitments have occasionally landed *The Mailboat* in dry dock. But sometimes in the stillness of a Harkers Island night, she hears *The Mailboat's* plaintiff whistle pleading for a return to service, and Karen launches her again.

The people of eastern North Carolina can't get enough of *The Mailboat*. It's a compass rose for our collective memories. A star to navigate home. Like the legendary vessels for which it is named, *The Mailboat* is always much anticipated, appreciated, vital, and eminently deserving of the North Carolina Folklore Society's Community Traditions Award.

Certificate of Recognition for Excellence in Preserving Cultural Heritage

Robert A. Vogel,
Superintendent, Cape Lookout National Seashore

~ *by Carmine Prioli*

When the torrents of Hurricane Isabel inundated North Carolina's coastal communities in September 2003, hundreds of homes were destroyed. Many of them were total losses. But those waters also threatened to dispossess Down Easters of more than their material belongings. The collateral damage wreaked upon family heirlooms and community treasures was, for untold numbers of individuals, more wrenching than the loss of furniture, appliances, clothing, and food. Books and yearbooks, family Bibles and photo albums, musical instruments, ancient quilts, and countless other craft items succumbed first to floodwaters and then to the moisture and mildew that followed.

While an army of volunteers from the coastal region and beyond rallied to feed, clothe, and house those who were displaced from their homes, a small group of men and women dedicated themselves to preservation efforts, salvaging many precious artifacts and preventing what would otherwise have been a nearly total loss of the objects and icons of our storied maritime communities. Of all the individuals who labored in this cause, one stands out as the leader in the effort to "res-



Robert A. Vogel addressing the audience gathered on Cape Lookout for the official transfer of Cape Lookout lighthouse from the U.S. Coast Guard to the Department of the Interior. *Photo by Andrew Prioli, 2003.*

cue” Down East culture—Cape Lookout National Seashore Superintendent Robert A. Vogel.

Within days after Isabel’s floods had dissipated, Bob Vogel called in a team of conservators from the National Park Service Harpers Ferry Center Conservation Lab. Specialists in wood and paper conservation, these individuals worked with other conservators from the North Carolina Maritime Museum and the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum to evaluate, restore, and repair family treasures. Meanwhile, Superintendent Vogel directed damage assessments and reconstruction projects along the entire fifty-five mile length of Cape Lookout National Seashore. Especially hard-hit were the village of Portsmouth, the fishing camps along Core Banks, and the historic structures in the vicinity of Cape Lookout Lighthouse.

Superintendent Vogel’s leadership in the wake of Hurricane Isabel demonstrated in dramatic fashion the promises he made to the people of the Down East region to preserve the natural environment of Cape Lookout and the human culture that contributes so much to that environment. With his tireless efforts on the ground (and in the air), he fulfilled with actions the words he spoke on June 14, 2003. On that day, he addressed several hundred individuals who had gathered on Cape Lookout to witness the historic transfer of Cape Lookout lighthouse from the U.S. Coast Guard to the Department of the Interior and Cape Lookout National Seashore. Superintendent Vogel called Cape Lookout “sacred ground.” He went on to say that America’s national parks “were places of human feeling long before they became parks. They are ancestral homelands.”

For many years and against tough odds, the people of Down East have been trying to preserve and pass on their coastal heritage. At times they have felt that this “sacred ground” was being swept from under them by economic and social forces even more irresistible than the winds and seas that for centuries made survival a daily challenge for their ancestors. So, to many of these individuals Superintendent Vogel’s words were the answer to their prayers. He went on to say:

We are coming to understand that parks become richer when we see them through the eyes of people whose ancestors once lived there. The National Park Service is here to recognize, appreciate and preserve the rich heritage of the Outer Banks. We are committed to sharing your stories through your own words to an American public that is all too frequently starved to experience your kind of connection to the land and the sea.

In his concluding remarks, Superintendent Vogel impressed everyone by adding:

So I promise you that in our new role as custodian of the lighthouse, we will treat it as lovingly as if it was one of your most cherished family heirlooms—because to many of you, it is just that.

In addition to being the chief custodian of a national seashore for the American people, cherishing family heirlooms is what Bob Vogel sees as one of his most fundamental responsibilities. Clearly, his definition of these heirlooms is about as inclusive as it could ever be: it embraces historic lighthouses and the ecosystems that surround them, as well as the precious, commonplace artifacts of human culture that convey so deeply what Bob calls the “shared emotional, spiritual, intellectual and sensual perceptions about the land—its sounds, smell and feel; its skies, wildlife, plants, and water.” Everything, in other words, that gives meaning and special poignancy to the lives of traditional human communities that have lived and struggled along North Carolina’s Outer Banks.

For his leadership and example in the rescue of artifacts of Down East culture in the aftermath of Hurricane Isabel, and for his dedication to preserving, appreciating, and celebrating the human accomplishments of our traditional maritime communities, it is with pleasure and gratitude that we present Bob Vogel with this certificate of recognition.

2004 Student Essay Competition Winners

Graduate Student Essay Awards

Departing somewhat from tradition this year, the North Carolina Folklore Society selected two graduate students to receive essay awards:

Aaron Smithers, a student in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Folklore Curriculum, received the W. Amos Abrams Award for "When the Smoke Clears: Tradition as Dynamic Process in North Carolina Barbecue." In this essay, Smithers examines "the present condition of traditional barbecue culture in North Carolina," by collecting and analyzing ethnographic data from four restaurants, two well-established ones, and two others less than two years old. By looking at the development of North Carolina barbecue specifically within a "commercial context," Smithers concludes that the older, "residual" restaurants are giving way to what he calls the "new guard" of barbecue producers who, while they strive to create a traditional barbecue, have turned to faster, easier production methods and are interpreting the tradition of North Carolina barbecue within "a modern context." Smithers wrote this essay for a seminar in folklore theory taught by Professor Patricia Sawin.

Blaine Q. Waide, also a student in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Folklore Curriculum, received the Cratis D. Williams Award for "'Set the House Up': Celebrating and Authoring Cultural Experience in Winston-Salem Drink Houses." Focusing on the life of Luther "Captain Luke" Mayer,* Waide attempts to achieve "a deep understanding of a social place and experience that was essential to many working-class African-Americans in Winston-Salem." Drink houses—"neighborhood places where one can buy a beer and people can get together"—contributed "substantially and significantly" to Luther's life, his music, and his art. (It was in a Forsyth County drink house where he received his nickname, "Captain Luke," in the early 1980s.) In addition, drink houses offer venues where, through music, dance, and food, African-American working-class culture can be celebrated. Waide wrote this essay for a seminar in Southern music offered by Professor William Ferris.

*Luther "Captain Luke" Mayer received a North Carolina Folklore Society Brown-Hudson Award in 2003. For the full citation, see NCFJ 51.1 (2004): 36-38.

Review Essays

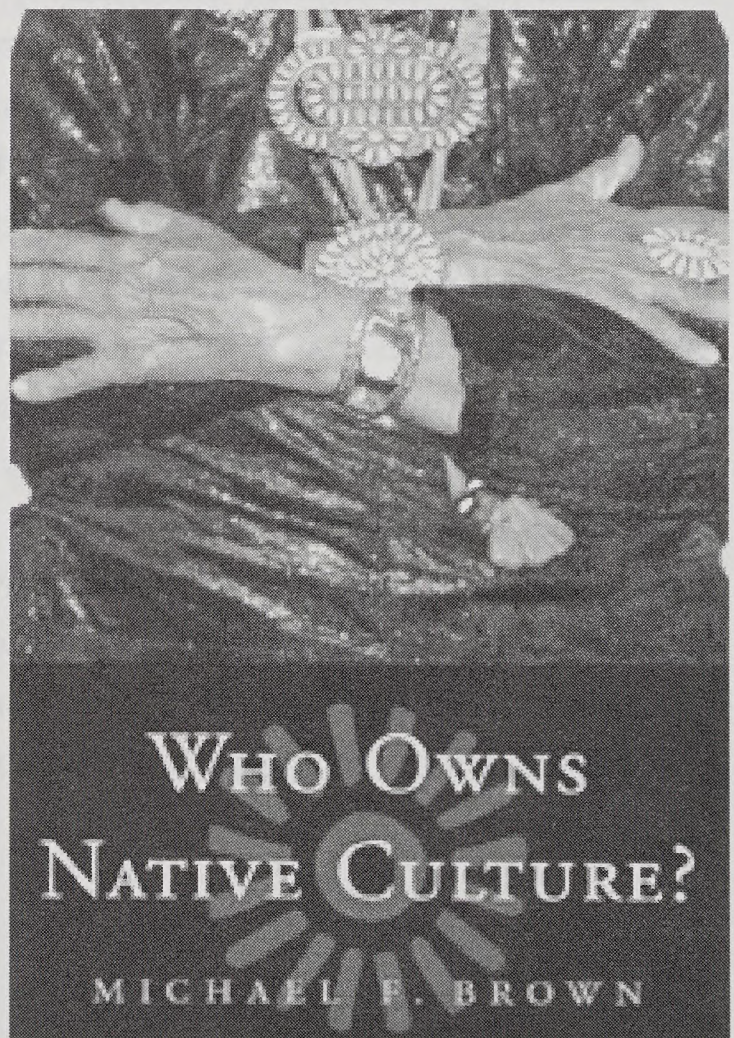
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Who Owns Native Culture? by Michael F. Brown

~reviewed by William J. Wheeler

I am going to begin with a strong endorsement of this engaging and important book. In *Who Owns Native Culture?* Michael F. Brown presents a balanced approach to a set of complex issues embedded in native rights, legal copyright, and national interests. Brown negotiates with care the many sides of an array of delicate ethical issues regarding the sometimes competing, sometimes common interests of interacting cultures. He offers clear analyses of an assortment of cases that reflect the scope and geography of the question of who—if anyone—may rightfully claim “ownership of [the] knowledge and artistic creations traceable to the world’s indigenous societies . . .” (ix). While none of these cases directly involves North Carolina disputes, they raise fundamental questions that everywhere affect folklorists and the cultures we study, and just about everyone else who in any way “traffic[s] in cultural information” (7). That is, historians, anthropologists, museum curators and archivists, as well as those who aim to privatize, commodify, profit from, or simply practice or imitate expressions of traditional culture.

Folklorists may connect Brown’s work to such articles as Handler and Linnekin’s “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious” or Deirdre Evans-Pritchard’s “The Portal Case: Authenticity, Tourism, Traditions, and the Law,” which deal with issues of claims to authenticity in reproduction and presentation of cultural materials.¹ Ethnomusicologists might see connections to Charles Keil and Stephen Felds’ work on the complexities of copyright in the



Cover illustration courtesy of Harvard University Press.

globalized music market.² Anthropologists might connect Brown's work to issues surrounding the 1990 Native Americans Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) because of the issues of ownership and changing anthropological sensitivities to collecting practices in situations of differential power. There are many more recent works³ and, of course, there is a long history of related ethical concerns about native rights in the disciplines of anthropology and folklore predating these articles. Brown traces the roots of current native rights movements to the 1980s when they emerged polygenetically from grassroots origins in native cultures, government, and research.

Brown begins his analysis with a familiar case involving missionary anthropologists, NAGPRA, museums, and Native Americans. In a chapter entitled "The Missionary's Photographs," he traces a complex interaction over time: competing interests within the Native American group, changing ethical understandings in the anthropological community, evolving institutional sensibilities in displaying artifacts, and the interaction of cultural values differing on what should be available for public inspection. He suggests that it is necessary to balance two factors: (1) whether "the circumstances under which the material was gathered meet the ethical standards of the researcher's own time" and (2) "whether the information's availability causes continuing harm" (41).

Moving his focus away from North America, Brown then examines Australian cases that illustrate how issues of ownership and law can differ between cultures and nations. One case concerned a painter's rights to his work, and his contestation of the unauthorized use of his paintings by Australian textile manufacturers and retailers. But embedded in this case are issues that question the artist's "right" to his own work. A particular Aboriginal clan—the Ganalbingu people indigenous to the Arafura Swamp in Australia's Northern Territory—lays a communal claim, regardless of legal copyright, to the artist's portrayal of the land and the spiritual element that infuses it. This chapter offers a fascinating insight into the complex intersections of religion and law, but also into the historically ingrained Western sensibility that "copy" rights are individual. Western notions of these rights center on protecting individual effort for the benefit of society, but in other societies this individualistic point of view conflicts with traditional rights that indigenous groups consider legally theirs to protect.

Selected titles of other chapters offer samplings of the wide variety of issues that Brown addresses. "Sign Wars" refocuses on the United States to look at two cases where trademark and tradition intersect: (1) New Mexico's incorporation of the Zia Pueblo sun symbol on their

state flag; and (2) a brewery's use of a revered leader's name and image to market Crazy Horse Malt Liquor. "Ethnobotany Blues" explores the issues that arise when pharmaceutical companies go "bioprospecting" and, in the process, commit what one activist group calls "biopiracy," exploiting for profit indigenous botanical knowledge. "At the Edge of the Indigenous" pairs cases from the United States and Australia that have a common theme: the issue of competing claims to religious practices. In one case, "New Age" religious practice claims Native American religion as one of their legitimate roots, to the chagrin of some Native Americans. For both groups this raises issues about who can legitimately use traditional sites and who can legitimately establish new sites for religious practice. "Native Heritage in the Iron Cage" discusses attempts to capture indigenous rights in law and questions whether culture can, in fact, be legally protected. Brown is skeptical because the various unintended consequences of protection tend to reify living culture and tend to shift power away from the group to the regulator.

In his final chapter, "Finding Justice in the Global Commons," Brown discusses legal attempts to negotiate the fine balance between the public interest and indigenous sensibilities. He asserts that progress will come from frequent compromises, "small victories, [and] innovative local solutions" hammered out by mutually respectful parties, who recognize that "a world ruled solely by proprietary passions is not a world in which most of us want to live" (252).

Who Owns Native Culture? is timely, yet it cannot be comprehensive because of the intertwined and constantly changing legal, economic, scientific, political, and cultural institutions that come into play whenever the matter of indigenous rights is raised. For instance, we can see now how the impact of globalization and online technologies are stirring up new challenges and possibilities for ownership, copying, and moneymaking in every area of society and culture. It is an open question whether these multifaceted complexities can be ameliorated, in Brown's words, by "negotiating mutual respect" (144) or by "finding justice in the global commons" (229), as he hopes. Yet, for the novice in the field, the well-read scholar, and perhaps even the indigenous participant, Brown clearly articulates the challenges and concerns. In his final analysis, Brown advocates a centrist position, what he calls an "awkward middle ground" that strikes a balance "between the interests of indigenous groups and the requirements of liberal democracy" (8-9).

Who Owns Native Culture? by Michael F. Brown. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2003. Pp. 315; illustrations; sources on indigenous cultural rights; index; \$29.95. ISBN: 0-674-01171-6. Paperback, 2004. \$16.95. ISBN: 0-674-01633-5. See also the author's website designed to supplement the book with additional resources "for understanding current debates about the legal status of indigenous art, music, folklore, biological knowledge, and sacred places." <http://www.williams.edu/go/native/>

Endnotes

¹ *Journal of American Folklore* 97.385 (1984): 273-90; *Journal of American Folklore* 100.397 (1987): 287-96.

² See Keil and Felds' "From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: on the Discourses and Commodification Practices of 'World Music' and 'World Beat'" and other chapters in *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

³ See, for example, the American Folklore Society's recommendations to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in *Journal of American Folklore* 117.465 (2004): 296-299.

*Howard W. Odum's Folklore Odyssey: Transformation to
Tolerance through African American Folk Studies*

by Lynn Moss Sanders

~ reviewed by Peter Compitello

This examination of Howard W. Odum's life is more than biography: it is a display of the influence of a gifted teacher and mentor on the ideology, politics, and social development of several generations of colleagues and students. The title of this book suggests Odum's involvement in the epic progression towards civil rights achievements in America and the South. It also suggests the influence of Odum's forays into African American folk studies on that progressive transformation, and is therefore a valuable resource for academics in a wide range of fields from sociology to anthropology, from folklore to literary studies, and from history to political science. As a transplanted New Yorker and novice student of Southern folklore and social history, I found Sanders' book to be an accessible, engaging, and informative discussion of Odum's life and work.

Howard W. Odum's Folklore Odyssey sheds light on the accomplishments of a man "remembered today for his practical contributions to the University of North Carolina, the state, and the region" (6). To Sanders, however, the beauty and magic of Odum's life go far beyond practical contributions. His diverse accomplishments can best be seen in his progressive theory of "new regionalism" that he applied to his studies and work in sociology and literature, his life as a folklorist as seen in his collaborative efforts that resulted in collections of African American folklife, and his fictional literary works that

Howard W. Odum's
Folklore Odyssey



Transformation to Tolerance
through African American Folk Studies

LYNN MOSS SANDERS

Cover illustration courtesy of University of
Georgia Press.

are the creative embodiment of his ideological concerns. Ultimately, Sanders illustrates the role that Odum's career as a folklorist, theorist, artist, collaborator, and mentor has had "in shaping and understanding the New South"(ix), proving that "one man's journey toward true racial understanding" (153) is something to be cherished as much for its efforts as for its effects.

In the initial portion of the book, Sanders discusses how Odum's collaborative work as a sociologist, combined with his "research and fieldwork in the area of black music"(19), began to transform the conservative environment of Southern academia into a more tolerant and understanding arena. As a sociologist, Sanders tells us, "Odum believed that cataloging the traits of the South was the first step towards merging the region with the rest of the nation while maintaining its distinctive culture" (6). This simple belief, the premise of which seems to be the same as Odum's theory of "new regionalism," led to the publication of *Southern Regions of the United States* (1936), "Odum's best-known contribution to sociology . . . a nearly seven-hundred page compilation and analysis of various aspects of Southern culture" (6). This publication is an example of Odum's prowess as an academician and sociologist.

Sanders also points out the dynamic aspect of his collaborative explorations of African American folk music in the New South with Guy Johnson and John "Left Wing" Wesley Gordon. As Odum worked alongside Johnson, the mentor became the mentored, and the collaboration process became the dynamic relationship that Sanders suggests had one of the most profound impacts on Southern culture: "Guy Johnson brought three important skills to Odum's work: editorial expertise, more up-to-date sociological training, and a musical gift" (25). The friendship between Odum and "Left Wing" Gordon—Odum's primary African American informant for *The Negro and His Songs* (1925), *Negro Workaday Songs* (1926), and the entire *Black Ulysses* trilogy—reminds us that "Although Johnson helped develop Odum's folklore theory, John Wesley Gordon brought about the most profound change in Odum's thinking on race" (52). Sanders argues that, "Although *Black Ulysses* is clearly intended to represent an African American Everyman, Odum's shift from describing the 'group' to writing about a unique individual marks an important step in his intellectual revelations about race and his maturity as a folklorist" (87).

In attempting to preserve the voice of Gordon in the progressive trilogy, "Odum infuses traits of a number of literary genres—epic, myth, folktale—into his three novels, but he creates a work that cannot be defined by any one of these categories" (87). Sanders' in-depth literary

analysis of the Black Ulysses trilogy (90-116) provides “evidence of a change in attitude and thought brought in by learning methods of study in the fields of sociology and folklore from Guy Johnson and from his friendship with Left Wing Gordon” (116).

One of Sanders’ most important discussions focuses on the relationship between Odum and Paul Green. According to Sanders, most of Green’s biographers have not credited Odum with influencing the young playwright. Drawing upon original correspondence between Odum and Green between 1925 and 1930, Sanders argues convincingly that “something of a mentor relationship” (135) did exist between the two. In fact, Sanders sees Green’s career as “a clear embodiment of Odum’s literary and social ideals” (130), and she asserts that both Odum and Green used much of the same African American folklore in literature “as the basis for social comment” (133).

As Sanders concludes her book, she finalizes her argument that “Mentoring and Collaboration” are “Keys to Cultural Understanding.” While Sanders’ literary analysis shows that Odum’s writing may not be “of the same caliber as that of Faulkner” (56), what is of value from Odum’s life is best understood when considered in terms of the multifaceted approach he used to study and participate in the issues of race and culture in America. In her parting words, Sanders suggests something seminal about the dynamic relationship that exists between figures like Charles Washington Odum and ourselves: “The South of my childhood and adult life is a far more multicultural and tolerant place than it was in Odum’s youth, and the change is a result of his influence. Just as my academic career has been influenced by my various mentoring experiences, it has also been influenced positively by my research on Odum’s life. ‘I am a part of all that I have met’ seems an appropriate epigram for Howard Odum’s life and for those whose lives have been changed by his ideas” (167).

Howard W. Odum’s Folklore Odyssey: Transformation to Tolerance through African American Folk Studies, by Lynn Moss Sanders. Athens & London, University of Georgia Press, 2003. Pp. 184; illustrations; works cited; index; \$29.95. ISBN: 0-8203-2549-X.

Contributors

Karen Willis Amspacher is executive director of the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum on Harkers Island. A graduate of Appalachian State University, Karen is one of the most devoted and energetic advocates of Down East culture.

David Cecelski is the author of several books and articles, including *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (UNC Press, 2001), and the oral history series, "Listening to History," appearing in *The News & Observer*. He has held several visiting professorships, including the Lehman Brady Chair at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies and the Whichard Distinguished Chair in the Humanities at East Carolina University.

Peter Compitello, a recipient of the Guy Owen Memorial Scholarship, is a candidate for the MA degree in English at North Carolina State University, and assistant editor of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*.

Amy Davis has received Masters degrees in folklore and education from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She currently teaches K-8 music at Orange Charter School and she performs traditional string-band music with the Piedmont-based group, The Hushpuppies.

Connie Mason is a graduate of East Carolina University and a native of Eastern North Carolina. For the past sixteen years, she has been the historian/collections manager at the North Carolina Maritime Museum. Connie also serves as Secretary of the North Carolina Folklore Society.

Burkin Matthews served one year as student representative to the North Carolina Folklore Society. He is completing the requirements for the MA degree in the University of North Carolina Folklore Curriculum, and is a student teacher in Durham, North Carolina.

JoAnne Powell has a BA degree in biology from the University of California at Davis and a teaching certificate from East Carolina University. A former high school marine science teacher, she is currently the Curator of Education at the North Carolina Maritime Museum.

Carmin Prioli is a Professor of English and a Park Faculty Scholar at North Carolina State University. He is also editor of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*.

Cathy Larson Sky writes fiction and non-fiction in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Information on the work that she and her husband, Patrick Sky, are doing to promote and perform traditional Irish (Uilleann) pipe and fiddle music appears on their web page: <http://www.patricksky.com/>.

William J. Wheeler received a PhD in folklore and ethnomusicology from Indiana University, Bloomington. He is presently Assistant Head of Collection Management for Humanities and Social Sciences at the D.H. Hill Library, North Carolina State University.



Above: Wallace W. Garner (69) and granddaughter Tracy Pake (24).

Front cover: “Big” Dallas (71) and Mary Rose (69).

Back cover: Sisters (left to right), Joella (6), Alyson (5), Leah (3), and Emily Hancock (8).

All photos by Ulrich Mack.



Ulrich Mack
Inselmenschen—Island People



North Carolina Folklore Journal
Department of English
Campus Box 8105
North Carolina State University
Raleigh, NC 27695-8105
<http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/NCFJ>